

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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FALL ISSUE



DAYMARE
A Mystery Novel of the Future
By FREDRIC BROWN

MAN FROM THE STARS
A Fantastic Novelet
By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

PERIL ON PHOEBUS
A Space Patrol Novelet
By NELSON S. BOND

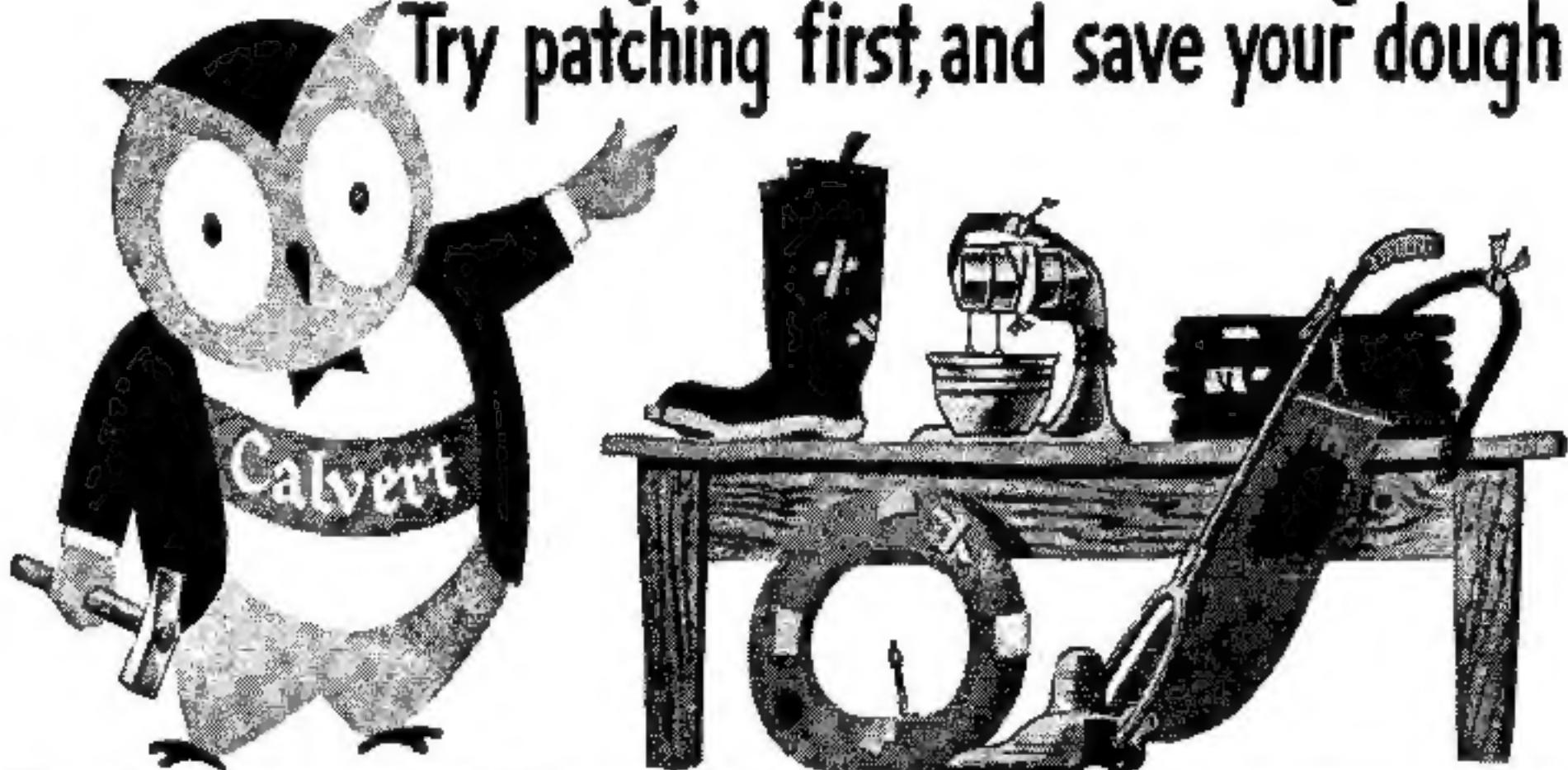
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SCIENTIFICKTION'S LEADING MAGAZINE

THRILLING

WONDER STORIES

The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction



Vol. XXV, No. 1
Fall, 1943

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A GOD NAMED KROO

An Amazing Complete
Novel

By HENRY KUTTNER

SPACE COMMAND

An Interplanetary
Novelet

By ROBERT ARTHUR

THE INVISIBLE ARMY

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By FREDRIC BROWN

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ON THE COVER: Painting by Earle Bergey depicts a scene from Nelson S. Bond's novelet, PERIL ON PHOEBUS.

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November, 1943, issue

Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope, and are submitted at the author's risk.

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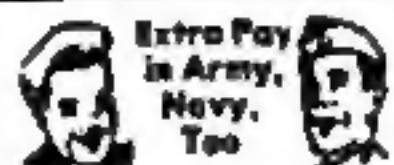
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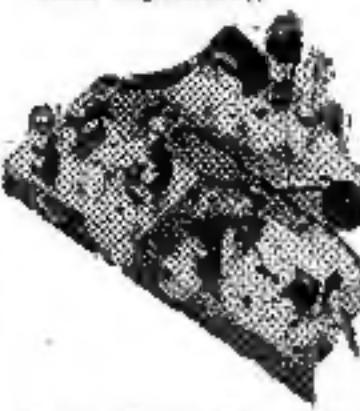
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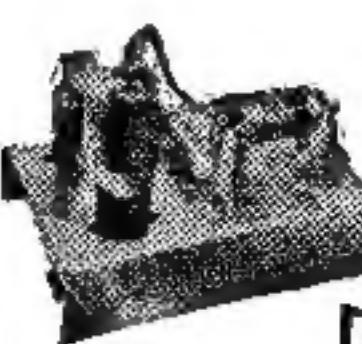
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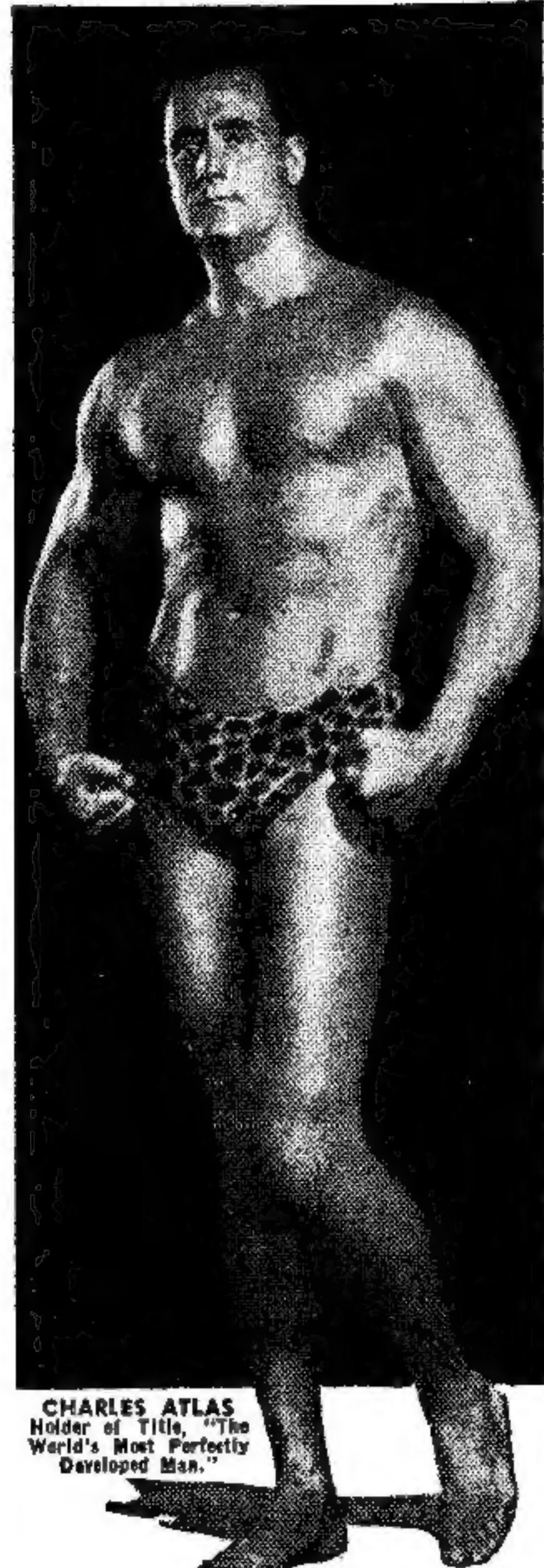
Do you want big, broad shoulders—a fine, powerful chest—biceps like steel—arms and legs rippling with muscular strength—a stomach ridged with bands of sinewy muscle—and a build that you can be proud of? Then just give me the opportunity to prove that "Dynamic Tension" is what you need.

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Check here if under 16 for Booklet A

LOOKING FORWARD

Where the Editors, Readers and Science Fiction League Members Meet

MANY minds are already at work figuring out how to transform a military world into a progressive, peaceful one with the least possible waste and friction. Now, don't start relaxing and slowing down in your work or your buying of War Bonds and Stamps.

The war job isn't finished yet. But it won't hurt to look forward!

Before we settle back down to the routine production of peacetime products, of building machines intended to produce only peacetime articles, there will be the important job of converting wartime products into peacetime utilities.

To replace much of the precious metals which are being shot away there will be, of course, the resurgence of plastics. What do you folks know about plastics? There's a lot to be learned—and we're only just starting!

What will we do with our highly geared airplane industry? But, before that, what will we do with the thousands of military planes now being turned out for fighting purposes? One wide-awake company is already making plans to utilize transports and bombers in a novel—and quite practical—way. Instead of moving cumbersome and expensive refrigerating machinery about the country in following the crops for quick freezing, this company proposes to convert these great birds of the air into flying vegetable and fruit trucks.

The prepared green—and ripe—stuff is to be placed in racks in sealed compartments within the plane. After which the pilot takes off and climbs as rapidly as possible to, say, thirty thousand feet. Here the ventilation ducts are to be opened, allowing the frigid air of the upper regions to penetrate. The intense cold, more intense and much cheaper than can be duplicated by ground machinery, will freeze the fruits and vegetables almost instantly. Then the pilot closes the vents and dives back to earth where the frozen stuff is quickly removed to refrigerated storehouses.

Ingenious, what? And practical and economical.

But this is only one idea where there should be thousands. So, how about you members of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE and read-

ers of science-fiction stories cudgeling your brains and giving out with ideas for converting to paths of peace the military works of war?

A New Chapter

We are pleased to announce the formation of a new SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE chapter at El Monte, California, under the leadership of Arthur Louis Joquel, II, and quite thirsty for new members. We welcome Coventry Chapter into our SFL circle. And we understand there is something brewing up down Philadelphia way about which Sergeant Saturn will have a word to say in THE READER SPEAKS department. We hope to have the proper announcement to make here next issue.

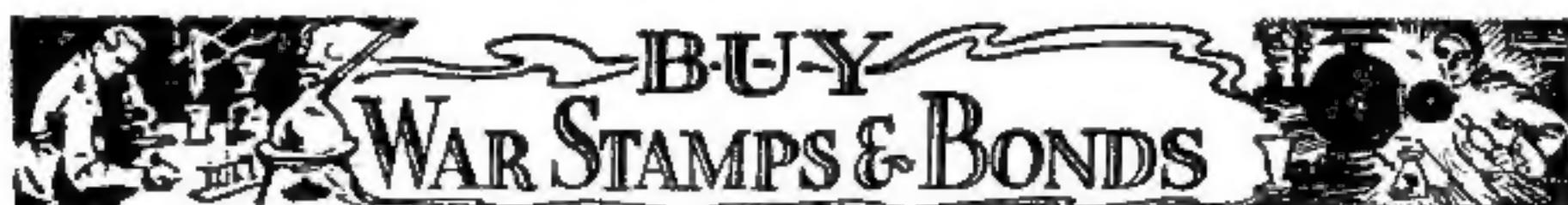
Meanwhile, the first step toward forming a chapter is to become a member of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. This is a pleasant and painless operation on the part of an individual who has not yet obeyed that impulse. Simply fill out and mail in the coupon you will find at the bottom of page 12. All you must do is to send your name and the name strip of this magazine. There is neither expense nor obligation. If you desire an emblem of your allegiance to wear in your lapel, just include fifteen cents in stamps with the coupon, and we'll send you a neat gold, blue and maroon SFL button.

After this, just get seven of your scientific fans together, hold a meeting, choose a chapter name, adopt some sort of constitution, notify the mother chapter here in New York—and you're in! Of course, there's the formality of a board meeting of the executives and the granting of a charter, a thing of beautiful lettering suitable for framing and hanging in the meeting room of your new chapter—but that is something we will take care of for you and which you will receive in due course.

You see, Sergeant Saturn has some sort of pull with the board.

So, there you are. And science fiction acquires another band of loyal supporters.

(Continued on page 10)



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LOOKING FORWARD

(Continued from page 8)

Meetings are pretty good fun, too—and stimulating.

Amateur Story Contest

We come now to one of our pet departments, hobbies, theories—or whatever you want to call it. The perennial Amateur Story Contest. No editor ever gets a bigger thrill out of discovering a new writer than we do when we find a new science fiction author. We give you here the findings of the Amateur Story Editor for the period just completed. Alas, we have but one winner!

Here is the latest report.

Winner

Frank Ferry, of Seattle, Washington, for HORATIO AT THE BRIDGE.

Honorable Mention

Walter Taylor, Bakersfield, California.

Edith Dunnivant, Richmond, Virginia.

Rodney Palmer, Chicago, Illinois.

Marvin Lewallen, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Jonathan Clark, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico.

Now, how about other of you scienfiction fans typing out a little gem of a yarn for the edification of our contest editor? He is really a soft-hearted gent who tears his hair, bites his nails, and walks the floor at night when no amateur story comes in that he can put his stamp of approval on. Come on, fans, give, and let the poor guy get some sleep.

The rules are so simple we hate to call them rules. Just sit down and write a short scienfiction story of from one thousand to six thousand words in length. The choice of subject is your own. Just type the yarn, double-spaced, on one side of standard white paper (8½x 11), address it to The Amateur Contest Editor, THRILLING WONDER STORIES, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y., include sufficient return postage, and sit there gnawing your own fingernails until the contest editor files his report.

The only stipulation—or restriction—is that you have never sold a story anywhere before. The prize is payment for your story—if it rings the bell—at the standard, regular rate.

How about giving us a nice long list of winners to publish in this department next issue?

Stories Ahead

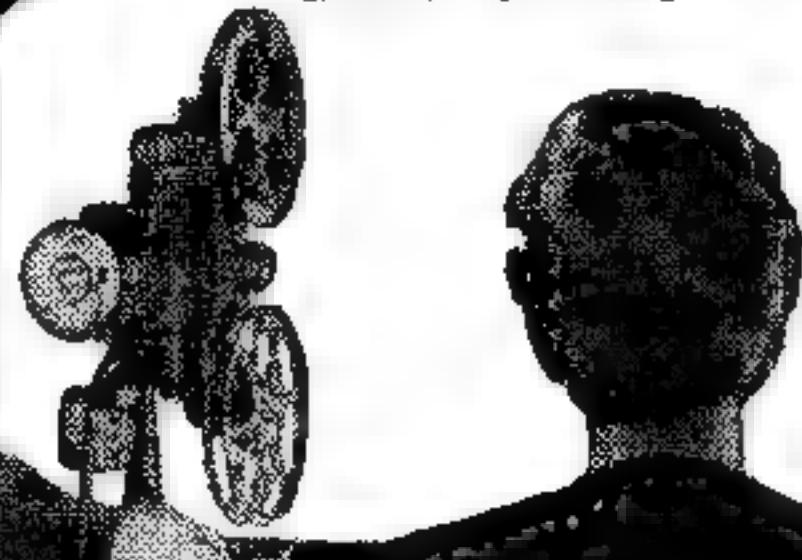
We got so interested in the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE and the Amateur Contest that we have delayed telling you about the stories coming up for your enjoyment. Looking forward, we find that a treat is in store for you Kuttner fans next issue.

Henry has done a fantastic short novel for us which is thrilling and hilarious and suspenseful by turns. It is laid in Burma and Tibet, and its implications are terrific. A GOD NAMED KROO is a novel you won't soon forget!

As you know, we are trying to keep the field of science fiction as broad as possible without running into sheer fantasy. While a few die-hards are howling about the appearance of such "off-the-trail" yarns as THE DEVIL'S

(Concluded on page 12)

WARTIME OPPORTUNITIES for You in ACCOUNTING



supply is diminishing. That spells opportunity for many—perhaps for you.

The reason is simple.

Government needs more accountants. Many new activities are enlarging old bureaus and creating new ones—military, supplies, taxes, priorities, social security, price regulation, more indeed than we can name here.

Industry needs more accountants. New plants, enlarged plants, conversion to war production, more government regulations and reports, taxes, priorities, etc.—all call for more and better records.

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10-43

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LOOKING FORWARD

(Concluded from page 10)

FIDDLE and THE LOTOS EATERS, the general response to such stories is overwhelming in approval.

But let's get on with the forward peek. SPACE COMMAND is a vigorous, packed-to-the-gills novelet of science fiction by a favorite author, Robert Arthur. You readers who want fundamental science in your diet will find it here.

The next story we see listed for immediate shipment is THE INVISIBLE ARMY, a stirring and thought-provoking yarn by Ross Rocklynne. If you read EXILE TO CENTAURI in our August issue, you have a good idea of the style of writing to expect. But you will find an entirely different type of story.

There will be other short stories, articles and features, of course. And—here's a tip—we are laying long-distance plans to get you exceptionally good and different stories for the months to come. So, consider yourselves warned, and be prepared for good reading!

The Trilogy

Speaking of good reading in the scientific field automatically reminds us of the two companion magazines of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. If you haven't yet made the acquaintance of CAPTAIN FUTURE and STARTLING STORIES, you have been missing something. Make a date with them at your favorite newsstand and, between the three magazines, read the best of every type of wonder fiction and fantasy and fact that we can bring to you.

Now I think Sergeant Saturn is summoning the crew to the astrogation chamber. Good spacing to you, and we will be looking forward to meeting you here next issue.

—THE EDITOR.

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Shadowy figures pressed forward beside Caquer

DAYMARE

By FREDRIC BROWN

Police Lieutenant Rod Caquer Tackles a Case of Murder on Callisto and Pits Himself Against a Sinister Fiend Who Plots to Degrade Mankind to the Plane of Robot Slaves!

CHAPTER I

Five Way Corpse

IT STARTED out like a simple case of murder. That was bad enough in itself, because it was the first murder during the five years Rod Caquer had been Lieutenant of Police in Sector Three of Callisto.

Sector Three was proud of that rec-

ord, or had been until the record became a dead duck.

But before the thing was over, nobody would have been happier than Rod Caquer if it had stayed a simple case of murder—without cosmic repercussions.

Events began to happen when Rod Caquer's buzzer made him look up at the visiscreen.

There he saw the image of Barr Maxon, Regent of Sector Three.

A MYSTERY NOVEL OF THE FUTURE

"Morning, Regent," Caquer said pleasantly. "Nice speech you made last night on the—"

Maxon cut him short. "Thanks, Caquer," he said. "You know Willem Deem?"

"The book-and-reel shop proprietor? Yes, slightly."

"He's dead," announced Maxon. "It seems to be murder. You better go there."

His image clicked off the screen before Caquer could ask any questions. But the questions could wait anyway. He was already on his feet and buckling on his shortsword.

Murder on Callisto? It did not seem possible, but if it had really happened he should get there quickly. Very quickly, if he was to have time for a look at the body before they took it to the incinerator.

On Callisto, bodies are never held for more than an hour after death because of the hylra spores which, in minute quantity, are always present in the thinish atmosphere. They are harmless, of course, to live tissue, but they tremendously accelerate the rate of putrefaction in dead animal matter of any sort.

Dr. Skidder, the Medico-in-Chief, was coming out the front door of the book-and-reel shop when Lieutenant Caquer arrived there, breathless.

The medico jerked a thumb back over his shoulder. "Better hurry if you want a look," he said to Caquer. "They're taking it out the back way. But I've examined—"

CAQUER ran on past him and caught the white-uniformed utility men at the back door of the shop.

"Hi, boys, let me take a look," Caquer cried as he peeled back the sheet that covered the thing on the stretcher.

It made him feel a bit sickish, but there was not any doubt of the identity of the corpse or the cause of death. He had hoped against hope that it would turn out to have been an accidental death after all. But the skull had been cleaved down to the eyebrows—a blow struck by a strong man with a heavy sword.

"Better let us hurry, Lieutenant. It's almost an hour since they found him."

Caquer's nose confirmed it, and he put the sheet back quickly and let the utility men go on to their gleaming white truck parked just outside the door.

He walked back into the shop, thoughtfully, and looked around. Everything seemed in order. The long shelves of celluwrapped merchandise were neat and orderly. The row of booths along the other side, some equipped with an enlarger for book customers and the others with projectors for those who were interested in the microfilms, were all empty and undisturbed.

ALITTLE crowd of curious persons was gathered outside the door, but Brager, one of the policemen, was keeping them out of the shop.

"Hey, Brager," said Caquer, and the patrolman came in and closed the door behind him.

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Know anything about this? Who found him, and when, and so on?"

"I did, almost an hour ago. I was walking by on my beat when I heard the shot."

Caquer looked at him blankly.

"The shot?" he repeated.

"Yeah. I ran in and there he was dead and nobody around. I knew nobody had come out the front way, so I ran to the back and there wasn't anybody in sight from the back door. So I came back and put in the call."

"To whom? Why didn't you call me direct, Brager?"

"Sorry, Lieutenant, but I was excited and I pushed the wrong button and got the Regent. I told him somebody had shot Deem and he said stay on guard and he'd call the Medico and the utility boys and you."

In that order? Caquer wondered. Apparently, because Caquer had been the last one to get there.

But he brushed that aside for the more important question—the matter of Brager having heard a shot. That did not make sense, unless—no, that was absurd, too. If Willem Deem had been



As the figure of Jane Gordon pleaded, Red Caquer brought down his sword hard
17

shot, the Medico would not have split his skull as part of the autopsy.

"What do you mean by a shot, Brager?" Caquer asked. "An old-fashioned explosive weapon?"

"Yeah," said Brager. "Didn't you see the body? A hole right over the heart. A bullet-hole, I guess. I never saw one before. I didn't know there was a gun on Callisto. They were outlawed even before the blasters were."

Caquer nodded slowly.

"You—you didn't see evidence of any other—uh—wound?" he persisted.

"Earth, no. Why would there be any other wound? A hole through a man's heart's enough to kill him, isn't it?"

"Where did Dr. Skidder go when he left here?" Caquer inquired. "Did he say?"

"Yeah, he said you would be wanting his report so he'd go back to his office and wait till you came around or called him. What do you want me to do, Lieutenant?"

Caquer thought a moment.

"Go next door and use the visiphone there, Brager—I'll be busy on this one," Caquer at last told the policeman. "Get three more men, and the four of you canvass this block and question everyone."

"You mean whether they saw anybody run out the back way, and if they heard the shot, and that sort of thing?" asked Brager.

"Yes. Also anything they may know about Deem, or who might have had a reason to—to shoot him."

BRAGER saluted, and left.

Caquer got Dr. Skidder on the visiphone. "Hello, Doctor," he said. "Let's have it."

"Nothing but what met the eye, Rod. Blaster, of course. Close range."

Lieutenant Rod Caquer steadied himself. "Say that again, Medico."

"What's the matter," jibed Skidder. "Never see a blaster death before? Guess you wouldn't have at that, Rod, you're too young. But fifty years ago when I was a student, we got them once in a while."

"Just how did it kill him?"

Dr. Skidder looked surprised. "Oh, you didn't catch up with the clearance men then. I thought you'd seen it. Left shoulder, burned all the skin and flesh off and charred the bone. Actual death was from shock—the blast didn't hit a vital area. Not that the burn wouldn't have been fatal anyway, in all probability. But the shock made it instantaneous."

Dreams are like this, Caquer told himself.

"In dreams things happen without meaning anything," he thought. "But I'm not dreaming, this is real."

"Any other wounds, or marks on the body?" he asked, slowly.

"None. I'd suggest, Rod, you concentrate on a search for that blaster. Search all of Sector Three, if you have to. You know what a blaster looks like, don't you?"

"I've seen pictures," said Caquer. "Do they make a noise, Medico? I've never seen one fired."

Dr. Skidder shook his head. "There's a flash and a hissing sound, but no report."

"It couldn't be mistaken for a gunshot?"

The doctor stared at him.

"You mean an explosive gun? Of course not. Just a faint s-s-s-s. One couldn't hear it more than ten feet away."

When Lieutenant Caquer had clicked off the visiphone, he sat down and closed his eyes to concentrate. Somehow he had to make sense out of three conflicting sets of observations. His own, the patrolman's, and the medico's.

Brager had been the first one to see the body, and he said there was a hole over the heart. And that there were no other wounds. He had heard the report of the shot.

Caquer thought, suppose Brager is lying. It still doesn't make sense. Because according to Dr. Skidder, there was no bullet-hole, but a blaster-wound. Skidder had seen the body after Brager had.

Someone could, theoretically at least,

have used a blaster in the interim, on a man already dead. But—

But that did not explain the head wound, nor the fact that the medico had not seen the bullet-hole.

Someone could, theoretically at least, have struck the skull with a sword between the time Skidder had made the autopsy and the time he, Rod Caquer, had seen the body. But—

But that didn't explain why he hadn't seen the charred shoulder when he'd lifted the sheet from the body on the stretcher. He might have missed seeing a bullet-hole, but he would not, and he could not, have missed seeing a shoulder in the condition Dr. Skidder described it.

Around and around it went, until at last it dawned on him that there was only one explanation possible. The Medico-in-Chief was lying, for whatever mad reason. Brager's story could be true, in toto. That meant, of course, that he, Rod Caquer, had overlooked the bullet-hole Brager had seen; but that was possible.

But Skidder's story could not be true. Skidder himself, at the time of the autopsy, could have inflicted the wound in the head. And he could have lied about the shoulder-wound. Why—unless the man was mad—he would have done either of those things, Caquer could not imagine. But it was the only way he could reconcile all the factors.

But by now the body had been disposed of. It would be his word against Dr. Skidder's—

BUT wait!—the utility men, two of them, would have seen the corpse when they put it on the stretcher.

Quickly Caquer stood up in front of the visiphone and obtained a connection with utility headquarters.

"The two clearance men who took a body from Shop 9364 less than an hour ago—have they reported back yet?" he asked.

"Just a minute, Lieutenant . . . Yes, one of them was through for the day and went on home. The other one is here."

"Put him on."

Rod Caquer recognized the man who stepped into the screen. It was the one of the two utility men who had asked him to hurry.

"Yes, Lieutenant?" said the man.

"You helped put the body on the stretcher?"

"Of course."

"What would you say was the cause of death?"

The man in white looked out of the screen incredulously.

"Are you kidding me, Lieutenant?" he grinned. "Even a moron could see what was wrong with that stiff."

Caquer frowned.

"Nevertheless, there are conflicting statements. I want your opinion."

"Opinion? When a man has his head cut off, what two opinions can there be, Lieutenant?"

Caquer forced himself to speak calmly. "Will the man who went with you confirm that?"

"Of course. Earth's Oceans! We had to put it on the stretcher in two pieces. Both of us for the body, and then Walter picked up the head and put it on next to the trunk. The killing was done with a disintegrator beam, wasn't it?"

"You talked it over with the other man?" said Caquer. "There was no difference of opinion between you about the—uh—details?"

"Matter of fact there was. That was why I asked you if it was a disintegrator. After we'd cremated it, he tried to tell me the cut was a ragged one like somebody'd taken several blows with an axe or something. But it was clean."

"Did you notice evidence of a blow struck at the top of the skull?"

"No. Say, lieutenant, you aren't looking so well. Is anything the matter with you?"

CHAPTER II

Terror by Night

THAT was the set-up that confronted Rod Caquer, and one can not blame him for beginning to wish it had been a

simple case of murder.

A few hours ago, it had seemed bad enough to have Callisto's no-murder record broken. But from there, it got worse. He did not know it then, but it was going to get still worse and that would be only the start.

It was eight in the evening, now, and Caquer was still at his office with a copy of Form 812 in front of him on the duraplast surface of his desk. There were questions on that form, apparently simple questions.

Name of Deceased: Willem Deem

Occupation: Prop. of book-and-reel shop

Residence: Apt. 8250, Sector Three, Clsto.

Place of Bus.: Shop 9364, S. T., Clsto.

Time of Death: Approx. 3 p.m. Clsto. Std. Time

Cause of Death:

Yes, the first five questions had been a breeze. But the six? He had been staring at that question an hour now. A Callisto hour, not so long as an Earth one, but long enough when you're staring at a question like that.

But confound it, he would have to put something down.

Instead, he reached for the visiphone button and a moment later Jane Gordon was looking at him out of the screen. And Rod Caquer looked back, because she was something to look at.

"Hello, Icicle," he said. "Afraid I'm not going to be able to get there this evening. Forgive me?"

"Of course, Rod. What's wrong? The Deem business?"

He nodded gloomily. "Desk work. Lot of forms and reports I got to get out for the Sector Coordinator."

"Oh. How was he killed, Rod?"

"Rule Sixty-five," he said with a smile, "forbids giving details of any unsolved crime to a civilian."

"Bother Rule Sixty-five. Dad knew Willem Deem well, and he's been a guest here often. Mr. Deem was practically a friend of ours."

"Practically?" Caquer asked. "Then I take it you didn't like him, Icicle?"

"Well—I guess I didn't. He was in-

teresting to listen to, but he was a sarcastic little beast, Rod. I think he had a perverted sense of humor. How was he killed?"

"If I tell you, will you promise not to ask any more questions?" Caquer said with a sigh.

Her eyes lighted eagerly. "Of course."

"He was shot," said Caquer, "with an explosive-type gun and a blaster. Someone split his skull with a sword, chopped off his head with an axe and with a disintegrator beam. Then after he was on the utility stretcher, someone stuck his head back on because it wasn't off when I saw him. And plugged up the bullet-hole, and—"

"Rod, stop driveling," cut in the girl. "If you don't want to tell me, all right."

Rod grinned. "Don't get mad. Say, how's your father?"

"Lots better. He's asleep now, and definitely on the upgrade. I think he'll be back at the university by next week. Rod, you look tired. When do those forms have to be sent in?"

"Twenty-four hours after the crime. But—"

"But nothing. Come on over here, right now. You can make out those old forms in the morning."

She smiled at him, and Caquer weakened. He was not getting anywhere anyway, was he?

"All right, Jane," he said. "But I'm going by patrol quarters on the way. Had some men canvassing the block the crime was committed in, and I want their report."

But the report, which he found waiting for him, was not illuminating. The canvass had been thorough, but it had failed to elicit any information of value. No one had been seen to leave or enter the Deem shop prior to Brager's arrival, and none of Deem's neighbors knew of any enemies he might have. No one had heard a shot.

ROD CAQUER grunted and stuffed the reports into his pocket, and wondered, as he walked to the Gordon home, where the investigation went from there. How did a detective go

about solving such a crime?

True, when he was a college kid back on Earth a few years ago, he had read detective stories. The detective usually trapped someone by discovering a discrepancy in his statements. Generally in a rather dramatic manner, too.

There was Wilder Williams, the greatest of all the fictional detectives, who could look at a man and deduce his whole life history from the cut of his clothes and the shape of his hands. But Wilder Williams had never run across a victim who had been killed in as many ways as there were witnesses.

He spent a pleasant—but futile—evening with Jane Gordon, again asked her to marry him, and again was refused. But he was used to that. She was a bit cooler this evening than usual, probably because she resented his unwillingness to talk about Willem Deem.

And home, to bed.

Out the window of his apartment, after the light was out, he could see the monstrous ball of Jupiter hanging low in the sky, the green-black midnight sky. He lay in bed and stared at it until it seemed that he could still see it after he had closed his eyes.

Willem Deem, deceased. What was he going to do about Willem Deem. Around and around, until at last one orderly thought emerged from chaos.

Tomorrow morning he would talk to the Medico. Without mentioning the sword wound in the head, he would ask Skidder about the bullet hole Brager claimed to have seen over the heart. If Skidder still said the blaster burn was the only wound, he would summon Brager and let him argue with the Medico.

And then — Well, he would worry about what to do then when he got there. He would never get to sleep this way.

He thought about Jane, and went to sleep.

After a while, he dreamed. Or was it a dream? If so, then he dreamed that he was lying there in bed, almost but not quite awake, and that there were whispers coming from all corners of the room. Whispers out of the darkness.



The master of men's minds

For big Jupiter had moved on across the sky now. The window was a dim, scarcely-discernible outline, and the rest of the room in utter darkness.

Whispers!

"—kill them."

"You hate them, you hate them, you hate them."

"—kill, kill, kill."

"Sector Two gets all the gravy and Sector Three does all the work. They exploit our corla plantations. They are evil. Kill them, take over."

"You hate them, you hate them, you hate them."

"Sector Two is made up of weaklings and usurers. They have the taint of Martian blood. Spill it, spill Martian blood. Sector Three should rule Callisto. Three the mystic number. We are destined to rule Callisto."

"You hate them, you hate them."

"—kill, kill, kill."

"Martian blood of usurious villians. You hate them, you hate them, you hate them."

Whispers.

"Now—now—now."

"Kill them, kill them."

"A hundred ninety miles across the flat planes. Get there in an hour in monocars. Surprise attack. Now. Now. Now."

And Rod Caquer was getting out of bed, fumbling hastily and blindly into his clothing without turning on the light because this was a dream and dreams were in darkness.

HIS sword was in the scabbard at his belt and he took it out and felt the edge and the edge was sharp and ready to spill the blood of the enemy he was going to kill.

Now it was going to swing in arcs of red death, his unblooded sword—the anachronistic sword that was his badge of office, of authority. He had never drawn the sword in anger, a stubby symbol of a sword, scarce eighteen inches long; enough, though, enough to reach the heart — four inches to the heart.

The whispers continued.

"You hate them, you hate them, you

hate them."

"Spill the evil blood; kill, spill, kill, spill."

"Now, now, now, now."

Unsheathed sword in clenched fist, he was stealing silently out the door, down the stairway, past the other apartment doors.

And some of the doors were opening, too. He was not alone, there in the darkness. Other figures moved beside him in the dark.

He stole out of the door and into the night-cooled darkness of the street, the darkness of the street that should have been brightly lighted. That was another proof that this was a dream. Those street-lights were never off, after dark. From dusk till dawn, they were never off.

But Jupiter over there on the horizon gave enough light to see by. Like a round dragon in the heavens, and the red spot like an evil, malignant eye.

Whispers breathed in the night, whispers from all around him.

"Kill—kill—kill—"

"You hate them, you hate them, you hate them."

The whispers did not come from the shadowy figures about him. They pressed forward silently, as he did.

Whispers came from the night itself, whispers that now began to change tone.

"Wait, not tonight, not tonight, not tonight," they said.

"Go back, go back, go back."

"Back to your homes, back to your beds, back to your sleep."

And the figures about him were standing there, fully as irresolute as he had now become. And then, almost simultaneously, they began to obey the whispers. They turned back, and returned the way they had come, and as silently....

Rod Caquer awoke with a mild headache and a hang-over feeling. The sun, tiny but brilliant, was already well up in the sky.

His clock showed him that he was a bit later than usual, but he took time to lie there for a few minutes, just the same, remembering that screwy dream

he'd had. Dreams were like that; you had to think about them right away when you woke up, before you were really fully awake, or you forgot them completely.

A silly sort of dream, it had been. A mad, purposeless, dream. A touch of atavism, perhaps? A throwback to the days when peoples had been at each other's throats half the time, back to the days of wars and hatreds and struggle for supremacy.

This was before the Solar Council, meeting first on one inhabited planet and then another, had brought order by arbitration, and then union. And now war was a thing of the past. The inhabitable portion of the solar system—Earth, Venus, Mars, and the moons of Jupiter—were all under one government.

But back in the old bloody days, people must have felt as he had felt in that atavistic dream. Back in the days when Earth, united by the discovery of space travel, had subjugated Mars—the only other planet already inhabited by an intelligent race—and then had spread colonies wherever Man could get a foothold.

Certain of those colonies had wanted independence and, next, supremacy. The bloody centuries, those times were called now.

GETTING out of bed to dress, he saw something that puzzled and dismayed him. His clothing was not neatly folded over the back of the chair beside the bed as he had left it. Instead, it was strewn about the floor as though he had undressed hastily and carelessly in the dark.

"Earth!" he thought. "Did I sleep-walk last night? Did I actually get out of bed and go out into the street when I dreamed that I did? When those whispers told me to?"

"No," he then told himself, "I've never walked in my sleep before, and I didn't then. I must simply have been careless when I undressed last night. I was thinking about the Deem case. I don't actually remember hanging my clothes on that chair."

So he donned his uniform quickly and hurried down to the office. In the light of morning it was easy to fill out those forms. In the "Cause of Death" blank he wrote, "Medical Examiner reports that shock from a blaster wound caused death."

That let him out from under; he had not said that was the cause of death; merely that the medico said it was.

CHAPTER III

Blackdex

HE RANG for a messenger and gave him the reports with instructions to rush them to the mail ship that would be leaving shortly. Then he called Barr Maxon.

"Reporting on the Deems matter, Regent," he said. "Sorry, but we just haven't got anywhere on it yet. Nobody was seen leaving the shop. All the neighbors have been questioned. Today I'm going to talk to all his friends."

Regent Maxon shook his head.

"Use all jets, Lieutenant," he said. "The case must be cracked. A murder, in this day and age, is bad enough. But an unsolved one is unthinkable. It would encourage further crime."

Lieutenant Caquer nodded gloomily. He had thought of that, too. There were the social implications of murder to be worried about—and there was his job as well. A Lieutenant of Police who let anyone get away with murder in his district was through for life.

After the Regent's image had clicked off the visiphone screen, Caquer took the list of Deem's friends from the drawer of his desk and began to study it, mainly with an eye to deciding the sequence of his calls.

He penciled a figure "1" opposite the name of Perry Peters, for two reasons. Peters' place was only a few doors away, for one thing, and for another he knew Perry better than anyone on the list, except possibly Professor Jan Gor-

don. And he would make that call last, because later there would be a better chance of finding the ailing professor awake—and a better chance of finding his daughter Jane at home.

Perry Peters was glad to see Caquer, and guessed immediately the purpose of the call.

"Hello, Shylock."

"Huh?" said Rod.

"Shylock—the great detective. Confronted with a mystery for the first time in his career as a policeman. Or have you solved it, Rod?"

"You mean Sherlock, you dope—Sherlock Holmes. No, I haven't solved it, if you want to know. Look, Perry, tell me all you know about Deem. You knew him pretty well, didn't you?"

Perry Peters rubbed his chin reflectively and sat down on the work bench. He was so tall and lanky that he could sit down on it instead of having to jump up.

"Willem was a funny little runt," he said. "Most people didn't like him because he was sarcastic, and he had crazy notions on politics. Me, I'm not sure whether he wasn't half right half the time, and anyway he played a swell game of chess."

"Was that his only hobby?"

"No. He liked to make things, gadgets mostly. Some of them were good, too, although he did it for fun and never tried to patent or capitalize anything."

"You mean inventions, Perry? Your own line?"

"Well, not so much inventions as gadgets, Rod. Little things, most of them, and he was better on fine workmanship than on original ideas. And, as I said, it was just a hobby with him."

"Ever help you with any of your own inventions?" asked Caquer.

"Sure, occasionally. Again, not so much on the idea end of it as by helping me make difficult parts." Perry Peters waved his hand in a gesture that included the shop around them. "My tools here are all for rough work, comparatively. Nothing under thousandths. But Willem has — had a little lathe that's a honey. Cuts anything, and ac-

curate to a fifty-thousandth."

"What enemies did he have, Perry?"

"None that I know of. Honestly, Rod. Lot of people disliked him, but just an ordinary mild kind of dislike. You know what I mean, the kind of dislike that makes 'em trade at another book-and-reel shop, but not the kind that makes them want to kill anybody."

"And who, as far as you know, might benefit by his death?"

"Um — nobody, to speak of," said Peters, thoughtfully. "I think his heir is a nephew on Venus. I met him once, and he was a likable guy. But the estate won't be anything to get excited about. A few thousand credits is all I'd guess it to be."

"Here's a list of his friends, Perry." Caquer handed Peters a paper. "Look it over, will you, and see if you can make any additions to it. Or any suggestions."

THE lanky inventor studied the list, and then passed it back.

"That includes them all, I guess," he told Caquer. "Couple on there I didn't know he knew well enough to rate listing. And you have his best customers down, too; the ones that bought heavily from him."

Lieutenant Caquer put the list back in his pocket.

"What are you working on now?" he asked Peters.

"Something I'm stuck on, I'm afraid," the inventor said. "I needed Deem's help—or at least the use of his lathe, to go ahead with this." He picked up from the bench a pair of the most peculiar-looking goggles Rod Caquer had ever seen. The lenses were shaped like arcs of circles instead of full circles, and they fastened in a band of resilient plastic obviously designed to fit close to the face above and below the lenses. At the top center, where it would be against the forehead of the goggles' wearer, was a small cylindrical box an inch and a half in diameter.

"What on earth are they for?" Caquer asked.

"For use in radite mines. The emana-

tions from that stuff, while it's in the raw state, destroys immediately any transparent substance yet made or discovered. Even quartz. And it isn't good on naked eyes either. The miners have to work blindfolded, as it were, and by their sense of touch."

ROD CAQUER looked at the goggles curiously.

"But how is the funny shape of these lenses going to keep the emanations from hurting them, Perry?" he asked.

"That part up on top is a tiny motor. It operates a couple of specially-treated wipers across the lenses. For all the world like an old-fashioned windshield

you could arrange for me to use it? Just for a day or so?"

"I don't see why not," Caquer told him. "I'll talk to whomever the Regent appoints executor, and fix it up. And later you can probably buy the lathe from his heir. Or does the nephew go in for such things?"

Perry Peters shook his head. "Nope, he wouldn't know a lathe from a drill-press. Be swell of you, Rod, if you can arrange for me to use it."

Caquer had turned to go, when Perry Peters stopped him.

"Wait a minute," Peters said and then paused and looked uncomfortable.

"I guess I was holding out on you,

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wiper, and that's why the lenses are shaped like the wiper-arm arcs."

"Oh," said Caquer. "You mean the wipers are absorbent and hold some kind of liquid that protects the glass?"

"Yes, except that it's quartz instead of glass. And it's protected only a minute fraction of a second. Those wipers go like the devil—so fast you can't see them when you're wearing the goggles. The arms are half as big as the arcs, and the wearer can see out of only a fraction of the lens at a time. But he can see, dimly, and that's a thousand per cent improvement in radite mining."

"Fine, Perry," said Caquer. "And they can get around the dimness by having ultra-brilliant lighting. Have you tried these out?"

"Yes, and they work. Trouble's in the rods; friction heats them and they expand and jam after it's run a minute, or thereabouts. I have to turn them down on Deem's lathe—or one like it. Think

Rod," the inventor said at last. "I do know one thing about Willem that might possibly have something to do with his death, although I don't see how, myself. I wouldn't tell it on him, except that he's dead, and so it won't get him in trouble."

"What was it, Perry?"

"Illicit political books. He had a little business on the side selling them. Books on the index—you know just what I mean."

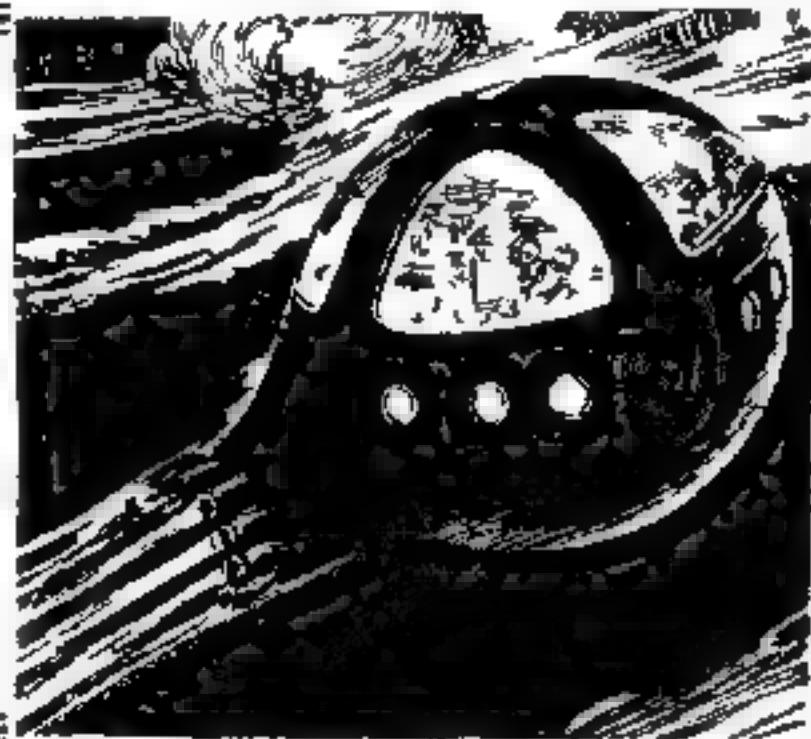
Caquer whistled softly. "I didn't know they were made any more. After the council put such a heavy penalty on them—whew!"

"People are still human, Rod. They still want to know the things they shouldn't know—just to find out why they shouldn't, if for no other reason."

"Graydex or Blackdex books, Perry?"

Now the inventor looked puzzled.

"I don't get it. What's the difference?"



"Books on the official index," Caquer explained, "are divided into two groups. The really dangerous ones are in the Blackdex. There's a severe penalty for owning one, and a death penalty for writing or printing one. The mildly dangerous ones are in the Graydex, as they call it."

"I wouldn't know which Willem peddled. Well, off the record, I read a couple Willem lent me once, and I thought they were pretty dull stuff. Unorthodox political theories."

"That would be Graydex." Lieutenant Caquer looked relieved. "Theoretical stuff is all Graydex. The Blackdex books are the ones with dangerous practical information."

"Such as?" The inventor was staring intently at Caquer.

"Instructions how to make outlawed things," explained Caquer. "Like Lethite, for instance. Lethite is a poison gas that's tremendously dangerous. A few pounds of it could wipe out a city, so the council outlawed its manufacture, and any book telling people how to make it for themselves would go on the Blackdex. Some nitwit might get hold of a book like that and wipe out his whole home town."

"But why would anyone?"

"He might be warped mentally, and have a grudge," explained Caquer. "Or he might want to use it on a lesser scale for criminal reasons. Or—by Earth, he might be the head of a government with designs on neighboring states. Knowledge of a thing like that might upset the peace of the Solar System."

Perry Peters nodded thoughtfully. "I get your point," he said. "Well, I still don't see what it could have to do with the murder, but I thought I'd tell you about Willem's sideline. You'll probably want to check over his stock before whoever takes over the shop re-opens."

"We shall," said Caquer. "Thanks a lot, Perry. If you don't mind, I'll use your phone to get that search started right away. If there are any Blackdex books there, we'll take care of them all right."

When he got his secretary on the screen, she looked both frightened and relieved at seeing him.

"Mr. Caquer," she said, "I've been trying to reach you. Something awful's happened. Another death."

"Murder again?" gasped Caquer.

"Nobody knows what it was," said the secretary. "A dozen people saw him jump out of a window only twenty feet up. And in this gravity that couldn't have killed him, but he was dead when they got there. And four of them that saw him knew him. It was—"

"Well, for Earth's sake, who?"

"I don't — Lieutenant Caquer, they said, all four of them, that it was Willem Deem!"

CHAPTER IV

Rule of Thumb

WITH a nightmarish feeling of unreality Lieutenant Rod Caquer peered down over the shoulder of the Medico-in-Chief at the body that already lay on the stretcher of the utility men, who stood by impatiently.

"You better hurry, Doc," one of them said. "He won't last much longer and it take us five minutes to get there."

Dr. Skidder nodded impatiently without looking up, and went on with his examination. "Not a mark, Rod," he said. "Not a sign of poison. Not a sign of anything. He's just dead."

"The fall couldn't have caused it?" said Caquer.

"There isn't even a bruise from the fall. Only verdict I can give is heart failure. Okay, boys, you can take it away."

"You through too, Lieutenant?"

"I'm through," said Caquer. "Go ahead. Skidder, which of them was Willem Deem?"

The medico's eyes followed the white-sheeted burden of the utility men as they carried it toward the truck, and he shrugged helplessly.

"Lieutenant, I guess that's your pigeon," he said. "All I can do is certify to cause of death."

"It just doesn't make sense," Caquer wailed. "Sector Three City isn't so big that he could have had a double living here without people knowing about it. But one of them had to be a double. Off the record, which looked to you like the original?"

DR. SKIDDER shook his head grimly.

"Willem Deem had a peculiarly shaped wart on his nose," he said. "So did both of his corpses, Rod. And neither one was artificial, or make-up. I'll stake my professional reputation on that. But come on back to the office with me, and I'll tell you which one of them is the real Willem Deem."

"Huh? How?"

"His thumbprint's on file at the tax department, like everybody's is. And it's part of routine to fingerprint a corpse on Callisto, because it has to be destroyed so quickly."

"You have thumbprints of both corpses?" inquired Caquer.

"Of course. Took them before you reached the scene, both times. I have the one for Willem—I mean the other corpse—back in my office. Tell you what—you pick up the print on file at the tax office and meet me there."

Caquer sighed with relief as he agreed. At least one point in the case would be cleared up—which corpse was which.

And in that comparatively blissful state of mind he remained until half an hour later when he and Dr. Skidder compared the three prints—the one Rod Caquer had secured from the tax office, and one from each of the corpses.

They were identical, all three of them.

"Um," said Caquer. "You're sure you didn't get mixed up on those prints, Dr. Skidder."

"How could I? I took only one copy from each body, Rod. If I had shuffled them just now while we were looking at them, the result would be the same. All three prints are alike."

"But they can't be."

Skidder shrugged.

"I think we should lay this before the Regent, direct," he said. "I'll call him and arrange an audience. Okay?"

Half an hour later, he was giving the whole story to Regent Barr Maxon, with Dr. Skidder corroborating the main points. The expression on Regent Maxon's face made Lieutenant Rod Caquer glad, very glad, that he had that corroboration.

"You agree," Maxon asked, "that this should be taken up with the Sector Co-ordinator, and that a special investigator should be sent here to take over?"

A bit reluctantly, Caquer nodded. "I hate to admit that I'm incompetent, Regent, or that I seem to be," Caquer said. "But this isn't an ordinary crime. Whatever goes on, it's way over my head. And there may be something even more sinister than murder behind it."

"You're right, Lieutenant. I'll see that a qualified man leaves headquarters to-day and he'll get in touch with you in the morning."

"Regent," Caquer asked, "has any machine or process ever been invented that will—uh—duplicate a human body, with or without the mind being carried over?"

MAXON seemed puzzled by the question.

"You think Deem might have been playing around with something that bit him. No, to my knowledge a discovery like that has never been approached. Nobody has ever duplicated, except by constructive imitation, even an inanimate object. You haven't heard of such a thing, have you, Skidder?"

"No," said the Medical Examiner. "I don't think even your friend Perry Peters could do that, Rod."

From the Regent Maxon's office, Caquer went to Deem's shop. Brager was in charge there, and Brager helped him search the place thoroughly. It was a long and laborious task, because each book and reel had to be examined minutely.

The printers of illicit books, Caquer knew, were clever at disguising their

product. Usually, forbidden books bore the cover and title page, often even the opening chapters, of some popular work of fiction, and the projection reels were similarly disguised.

Jupiter-lighted darkness was falling outside when they finished, but Rod Caquer knew they had done a thorough job. There wasn't an indexed book anywhere in the shop, and every reel had been run off on a projector.

Other men, at Rod Caquer's orders, had been searching Deem's apartment with equal thoroughness. He phoned there, and got a report, completely negative.

"Not so much as a Venusian pamphlet," said the man in charge at the apartment, with what Caquer thought was a touch of regret in his voice.

"Did you come across a lathe, a small one for delicate work?" Rod asked.

"Um—no, we didn't see anything like that. One room's turned into a workshop, but there's no lathe in it. Is it important?"

Caquer grunted noncommittally. What was one more mystery, and a minor one at that, to a case like this?

"Well, Lieutenant," Brager said, when the screen had gone blank, "What do we do now?"

Caquer sighed.

"You can go off duty, Brager," he said. "But first arrange to leave men on guard here and at the apartment. I'll stay until whoever you send comes to relieve me."

When Brager had left, Caquer sank wearily into the nearest chair. He felt terrible, physically, and his mind just did not seem to be working. He let his eyes run again around the orderly shelves of the shop and their orderliness oppressed him.

If there was only a clue of some sort. Wilder Williams had never had a case like this in which the only leads were two identical corpses, one of which had been killed five different ways and the other did not have a mark or sign of violence. What a mess, and where did he go from here?

Well, he still had the list of people

he was going to interview, and there was time to see at least one of them this evening.

Should he look up Perry Peters again, and see what, if anything, the lanky inventor could make of the disappearance of the lathe? Perhaps he might be able to suggest what had happened to it. But then again, what could a lathe have to do with a mess like this? One cannot turn out a duplicate corpse on a lathe.

Or should he look up Professor Gordon? He decided to do just that.

He called the Gordon apartment on the visiphone, and Jane appeared in the screen.

"How's your father," Jane asked Caquer. "Will he be able to talk to me for a while this evening?"

"Oh, yes," said the girl. "He's feeling much better, and thinks he'll go back to his classes tomorrow. But get here early if you're coming. Rod, you look terrible; what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, except I feel goofy. But I'm all right, I guess."

"You have a gaunt, starved look. When did you eat last?"

Caquer's eyes widened. "Earth! I forgot all about eating. I slept late and didn't even have breakfast!"

JANE GORDON laughed.

"You dope! Well, hurry around, and I'll have something ready for you when you get here."

"But—"

"But nothing. How soon can you start?"

A minute after he had clicked off the visiphone, Lieutenant Caquer went to answer a knock on the shuttered door of the shop.

He opened it. "Oh, hullo, Reese," he said. "Did Brager send you?"

The policeman nodded.

"He said I was to stay here in case. In case what?"

"Routine guard duty, that's all," explained Caquer. "Say, I've been stuck here all afternoon. Anything going on?"

"A little excitement. We been pulling in soap-box orators off and on all

day. Screwballs. There's an epidemic of them."

"The devil you say! What are they hipped about?"

"Sector Two, for some reason I can't make out. They're trying to incite people to get mad at Sector Two and do something about it. The arguments they use are plain nutty."

Something stirred uneasily in Rod Caquer's memory — but he could not quite remember what it was. Sector Two? Who'd been telling him things about Sector Two recently—usury, unfairness, tainted blood, something silly. Although of course a lot of the people over there did have Martian blood in them . . .

"How many of the orators were arrested?" he asked.

"We got seven. Two more slipped away from us, but we'll pick them up if they start spouting that kind of stuff again."

Lieutenant Caquer walked slowly, thoughtfully, to the Gordon apartment, trying his level best to remember where, recently, he heard anti-Sector Two propaganda. There must be something back of the simultaneous appearance of nine soap-box radicals, all preaching the same doctrine.

A sub-rosa political organization? But none such had existed for almost a century now. Under a perfectly democratic government, component part of a stable system-wide organization of planets, there was no need for such activity. Of course an occasional crackpot was dissatisfied, but a group in that state of mind struck him as fantastic.

It sounded as crazy as the Willem Deem case. That did not make sense either. Things happened meaninglessly, as in a dream. Dream? What was he trying to remember about a dream? Hadn't he had an odd sort of dream last night—what was it?

But, as dreams usually do, it eluded his conscious mind.

Anyway, tomorrow he would question—or help question—those radicals who were under arrest. Put men on the job of tracing them back, and undoubtedly

a common background somewhere, a tie-up, would be found.

It could not be accidental that they should all pop up on the same day. It was screwy, just as screwy as the two inexplicable corpses of a book-and-reel shop proprietor. Maybe because the cases were both screwy, his mind tended to couple the two sets of events. But taken together, they were no more digestible than taken separately. They made even less sense.

Confound it, why hadn't he taken that post on Ganymede when it was offered to him? Ganymede was a nice orderly moon. Persons there did not get murdered twice on consecutive days. But Jane Gordon did not live on Ganymede; she lived right here in Sector Three and he was on his way to see her.

And everything was wonderful except that he felt so tired he could not think straight, and Jane Gordon insisted on looking on him as a brother instead of a suitor, and he was probably going to lose his job. He would be the laughing-stock of Callisto if the special investigator from headquarters found some simple explanation of things that he had overlooked. . . .

CHAPTER V

Nine-Man Morris

JANE GORDON, looking more beautiful than he had ever seen her, met, him at the door. She was smiling, but the smile changed to a look of concern as he stepped into the light.

"Rod!" she exclaimed. "You do look ill, really ill. What have you been doing to yourself besides forgetting to eat?"

Rod Caquer managed a grin.

"Chasing vicious circles up blind alleys, Icicle. May I use your visiphone?"

"Of course. I've some food ready for you; I'll put it on the table while you're calling. Dad's taking a nap. He said to wake him when you got here, but I'll hold off until you're fed."

She hurried out to the kitchen. Ca-

quer almost fell into the chair before the visiscreen, and called the police station. The red, beefy face of Borgesen, the night lieutenant, flashed into view.

"Hi, Borg," said Caquer. "Listen, about those seven screwballs you picked up. Have you—"

"Nine," Borgesen interrupted. "We got the other two, and I wish we hadn't. We're going nuts down here."

"You mean the other two tried it again?"

"No. Suffering Asteroids, they came in and gave themselves up, and we can't kick them out, because there's a charge against them. But they're confessing all over the place. And do you know what they're confessing?"

"I'll bite," said Caquer.

"That you hired them, and offered one hundreds credits apiece to them."

"Huh?"

Borgesen laughed, a little wildly. "The two that came in voluntarily say that, and the other seven—Gosh, why did I ever become a policeman? I had a chance to study for fireman on a spacer once, and I end up doing this."

"Look—maybe I better come around and see if they make that accusation to my face."

"They probably would, but it doesn't mean anything, Rod. They say you hired them this afternoon, and you were at Deem's with Brager all afternoon. Rod, this moon is going nuts. And so am I. Walther Johnson has disappeared. Hasn't been seen since this morning."

"What? The Regent's confidential secretary? You're kidding me, Borg."

"Wish I was. You ought to be glad you're off duty. Maxon's been raising seven brands of thunder for us to find his secretary for him. He doesn't like the Deem business, either. Seems to blame us for it; thinks it's bad enough for the department to let a man get killed once. Say, which was Deem, Rod? Got any idea?"

Caquer grinned weakly.

"Let's call them Deem and Redeem till we find out," he suggested. "I think they were both Deem."

"But how could one man be two?"

"How could one man be killed five ways?" countered Caquer. "Tell me that and I'll tell you the answer to yours."

"Nuts," said Borgesen, and followed it with a masterpiece of understatement. "There's something funny about that case."

Caquer was laughing so hard that there were tears in his eyes, when Jane Gordon came to tell him food was ready. She frowned at him, but there was concern behind the frown.

Caquer followed her meekly, and discovered he was ravenous. When he'd put himself outside enough food for three ordinary meals, he felt almost human again. His headache was still there, but it was something that throbbed dimly in the distance.

Frail Professor Gordon was waiting in the living room when they went there from the kitchen. "Rod, you look like something the cat dragged in," he said. "Sit down before you fall down."

Caquer grinned. "Overeating did it. Jane's a cook in a million."

HE SANK into a chair facing Gordon. Jane Gordon had sat on the arm of her father's chair and Caquer's eyes feasted on her. How could a girl with lips as soft and kissable as hers insist on regarding marriage only as an academic subject? How could a girl with—

"I don't see offhand how it could be a cause of his death, Rod, but Willem Deem rented out political books," said Gordon. "There's no harm in my telling that, since the poor chap is dead."

Almost the same words, Caquer remembered, that Perry Peters had used in telling him the same thing.

Caquer nodded.

"We've searched his shop and his apartment and haven't found any, Professor," he said. "You wouldn't know, of course, what kind—"

Professor Gordon smiled. "I'm afraid I would, Rod. Off the record—and I take it you haven't a recorder on our conversation—I've read quite a few of them."

"You?" There was frank surprise in Caquer's voice.

"Never underestimate the curiosity of an educator, my boy. I fear the reading of Graydex books is a more prevalent vice among the instructors in universities than among any other class. Oh, I know it's wrong to encourage the trade, but the reading of such books can't possibly harm a balanced, judicious mind."

"And Father certainly has a balanced, judicious mind, Rod," said Jane, a bit defiantly. "Only --- darn him — he wouldn't let me read those books."

Caquer grinned at her. The professor's use of the word "Graydex" had reassured him.

Renting Graydex books was only a misdemeanor, after all.

"Ever read any Graydex books, Rod?" the professor asked. Caquer shook his head.

"Then you've probably never heard of hypnotism. Some of the circumstances in the Deem case—Well, I've wondered whether hypnotism might have been used."

"I'm afraid I don't even know what it is, Professor."

The frail little man sighed.

"That's because you've never read illicit books, Rod," said Gordon. "Hypnotism is the control of one mind by another, and it reached a pretty high state of development before it was outlawed. You've never heard of the Kaprelian Order or the Vargas Wheel?"

Caquer shook his head.

"The history of the subject is in Graydex books, in several of them," said the professor. "The actual methods, and how a Vargas Wheel is constructed would be Blackdex, high on the roster of the lawlessness. Of course, I haven't read that, but I have read the history."

"A man by the name of Mesmer, way back in the Eighteenth Century, was one of the first practitioners, if not the discoverer, of hypnotism. At any rate, he put it on a more or less scientific basis. By the Twentieth Century, quite a bit had been learned about it—and it became extensively used in medicine."

"A hundred years later, doctors were treating almost as many patients through hypnotism as through drugs and surgery. True, there were cases of its misuse, but they were relatively few."

"But another hundred years brought a big chance. Mesmerism had developed too far for the public safety. Any criminal or selfish politician who had a smattering of the art could operate with impunity. He could fool all the people all the time, and get away with it."

"You mean he could really make people think anything he wanted them to?" Caquer asked.

"Not only that, he could make them do anything he wanted. And by that time, television was in such common use that one speaker could visibly and directly talk to millions of people."

"But couldn't the government have regulated the art?"

PROFESSOR GORDON smiled thinly. "How, when legislators were human, too, and as subject to hypnotism as the people under them? And then, to complicate things almost hopelessly, came the invention of the Vargas Wheel.

"It had been known, back as far as the Nineteenth Century, that an arrangement of moving mirrors could throw anyone who watched it into a state of hypnotic submission. And thought transmission had been experimented with in the Twenty-first century. It was in the following one that Vargas combined and perfected the two into the Vargas Wheel. A sort of helmet affair, really, with a revolving wheel of specially constructed tricky mirrors on top of it."

"How did it work, Professor?" asked Caquer.

"The wearer of a Vargas Wheel helmet had immediate and automatic control over anyone who saw him—directly, or in a television screen," said Gordon. "The mirrors in the small turning wheel produced instantaneous hypnosis and the helmet — somehow — brought thoughts of its wearer to bear through the wheel and impressed upon his sub-

jects any thoughts he wished to transmit.

"In fact, the helmet itself — or the wheel — could be set to produce certain fixed illusions without the necessity of the operator speaking, or even concentrating, on those points. Or the control could be direct, from his mind."

"Ouch," said Caquer. "A thing like that would—I can certainly see why instructions in making a Vargas Wheel would be Blackdexed. Suffering Asteroids! A man with one of these could—"

"Could do almost anything. Including killing a man and making the manner of his death appear five different ways to five different observers."

Caquer whistled softly. "And including playing nine-man Morris with soapbox radicals — or they wouldn't even have to be radicals. They could be ordinary orthodox citizens."

"Nine men?" Jane Gordon demanded. "What's this about nine men, Rod. I hadn't heard about it."

But Rod was already standing up.

"Haven't time to explain, Icicle," he said. "Tell you tomorrow, but I must get down to—Wait a minute. Professor, is that all you know about the Vargas Wheel business?"

"Absolutely all, my boy. It just occurred to me as a possibility. There were only five or six of them ever made, and finally the government got hold of them and destroyed them, one by one. It cost millions of lives to do it."

"When they finally got everything cleaned up, colonization of the planets was starting, and an international council had been started with control over all governments. They decided that the whole field of hypnotism was too dangerous, and they made it a forbidden subject. It took quite a few centuries to wipe out all knowledge of it, but they succeeded. The proof is that you'd never heard of it."

"But how about the beneficial aspects of it," Jane Gordon asked. "Were they lost?"

"Of course," said her father. "But the science of medicine had progressed so

far by that time that it wasn't too much of a loss. Today the medicos can cure, by physical treatment, anything that hypnotism could handle."

Caquer who had halted at the door, now turned back.

"Professor, do you think it possible that someone could have rented a Blackdex book from Deem, and learned all those secrets?" he inquired.

Professor Gordon shrugged. "It's possible," he said. "Deem might have handled occasional Blackdex books, but he knew better than try to sell or rent any to me. So I wouldn't have heard of it."

At the station, Lieutenant Caquer found Lieutenant Borgesen on the verge of apoplexy.

He looked at Caquer.

"You!" he said. And then, plaintively, "The world's gone nuts. Listen, Brager discovered Willem Deem, didn't he? At ten o'clock yesterday morning? And stayed there on guard while Skidder and you and the clearance men were there?"

"Yes, why?" asked Caquer.

BORGESSEN'S expression showed how much he was upset by developments.

"Nothing, not a thing, except that Brager was in the emergency hospital yesterday morning, from nine until after eleven, getting a sprained ankle treated. He couldn't have been at Deem's. Seven doctors and attendants and nurses swear up and down he was in the hospital at that time."

Caquer frowned.

"He was limping today, when he helped me search Deem's shop," he said. "What does Brager say?"

"He says he was there, I mean at Deem's, and discovered Deem's body. We just happened to find out otherwise accidentally—if it is otherwise. Rod, I'm going nuts. To think I had a chance to be fireman on a spacer and took this celestial job. Have you learned anything new?"

"Maybe. But first I want to ask you, Borg. About these nine nitwits you picked up. Has anybody tried to identify—"

"Them," interrupted Borgesen. "I let them go."

Caquer stared at the beefy face of the night lieutenant in utter amazement.

"Let them go?" he repeated. "You couldn't, legally. Man, they'd been charged. Without a trial, you couldn't turn them loose."

"Nuts. I did, and I'll take the responsibility for it. Look, Rod, they were right, weren't they?"

"What?"

"Sure. People ought to be waked up about what's going on over in Sector Two. Those phonies over there need taking down a peg, and we're the only ones to do it. This ought to be headquarters for Callisto, right here. Why listen, Rod, a united Callisto could take over Ganymede."

"Borg, was there anything over the televis tonight? Anybody make a speech you listened to?"

"Sure, didn't you hear it? Our friend Skidder. Must have been while you were walking here, because all the televis turned on automatically—it was a general."

"And—was anything specific suggested, Borg? About Sector Two, and Ganymede, and that sort of thing?"

"Sure, general meeting tomorrow morning at ten. In the square. We're all supposed to go; I'll see you there, won't I?"

"Yeah," said Lieutenant Caquer. "I'm afraid you will. I—I got to go, Borg."

CHAPTER VI

Too Familiar Face

ROD CAQUER knew what was wrong now. Also the last thing he wanted to do was stay around the station listening to Borgesen talking under the influence of—what seemed to be—a Vargas Wheel. Nothing else, nothing less, could have made police Lieutenant Borgesen talk as he had just talked. Professor Gordon's guess was

getting righter every minute. Nothing else could have brought about such results.

Caquer walked on blindly through the Jupiter lighted night, past the building in which his own apartment was. He did not want to go there either.

The streets of Sector Three City seemed crowded for so late an hour of the evening. Late? He glanced at his watch and whistled softly. It was not evening any more. It was two o'clock on the morning, and normally the streets would have been utterly deserted.

But they were not, tonight. People wandered about, alone or in small groups that walked together in uncanny silence. Shuffle of feet, but not even the whisper of a voice. Not even—

. Whispers! Something about those streets and the people on them made Rod Caquer remember now, his dream of the night before. Only now he knew that it had not been a dream. Nor had it been sleepwalking, in the ordinary sense of the word.

He had dressed. He had stolen out of the building. And the street lights had been out too, and that meant that employes of the service department had neglected their posts. They, like others, had been wandering with the crowds.

Listening to last night's whispers. And what had those whispers said? He could remember part of it . . .

"Kill—kill—kill—You hate them..."

A shiver ran down Rod Caquer's spine as he realized the significance of the fact that last night's dream had been a reality. This was something that dwarfed into insignificance the murder of a petty book-and-reel shop owner.

This was something which was gripping a city, something that could upset a world, something that could lead to unbelievable terror and carnage on a scale that hadn't been known since the Twenty-fourth Century. This—which had started as a simple murder case!

Up ahead somewhere, Rod Caquer heard the voice of a man addressing a crowd. A frenzied voice, shrill with fanaticism. He hurried his steps to the corner, and walked around it to find

himself in the fringe of a crowd of people pressing around a man speaking from the top of a flight of steps.

"—and I tell you that tomorrow is the day. Now we have the Regent himself with us, and it will be unnecessary to depose him. Men are working all night tonight, preparing. After the meeting in the square tomorrow morning, we shall—"

"Hey!" Rod Caquer yelled. The man stopped talking and turned to look at Rod, and the crowd turned slowly, almost as one man, to stare at him.

"You're under—"

Then Caquer saw that this was but a futile gesture.

It was not because of the men surging toward him that convinced him of this. He was not afraid of violence. He would have welcomed it as relief from uncanny terror, welcomed a chance to lay about him with the flat of his sword.

But standing behind the speaker was a man in uniform—Brager. And Caquer remembered, then, that Borgesen, now in charge at the station, was on the other side. How could he arrest the speaker, when Borgesen, now in charge, would refuse to book him. And what good would it do to start a riot and cause injury to innocent people—people acting not under their own volition, but under the insidious influence Professor Gordon had described to him?

Hand on his sword, he backed away. No one followed. Like automatons, they turned back to the speaker, who resumed his harangue, as though never interrupted. Policeman Brager had not moved, had not even looked in the direction of his superior officer. He alone of all those there had not turned at Caquer's challenge.

LIUTENANT CAQUER hurried on in the direction he had been going when he had heard the speaker. That way would take him back downtown. He would find a place open where he could use a visiphone, and call the Sector Co-ordinator. This was an emergency.

And surely the scope of whoever had

the Vargas Wheel had not yet extended beyond the boundaries of Sector Three.

He found an all-night restaurant, open but deserted, the lights on but no waiters on duty, no cashier behind the counter. He stepped into the visiphone booth and pushed the button for a long-distance operator. She flashed into sight on the screen almost at once.

"Sector Co-ordinator, Callisto City," Caquer said. "And rush it."

"Sorry, sir. Out of town service suspended by order of the Controller of Utilities, for the duration."

"Duration of what?"

"We are not permitted to give out information."

Caquer gritted his teeth. Well, there was *one* someone who might be able to help him. He forced his voice to remain calm.

"Give me Professor Gordon, University Apartments," he told the operator.

"Yes, sir."

But the screen stayed dark, although the little red button that indicated the buzzer was operating flashed on and off, for minutes.

"There is no answer, sir."

Probably Gordon and his daughter were asleep, too soundly asleep to hear the buzzer. For a moment, Caquer considered rushing over there. But it was on the other side of town, and of what help could they be? None, and Professor Gordon was a frail old man, and ill.

No, he would have to— Again he pushed a button of the visiphone and a moment later was talking to the man in charge of the ship hangar.

"Get out that little speed job of the Police Department," snapped Caquer. "Have it ready and I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Sorry, Lieutenant," came the curt reply. "All outgoing power beams shut off, by special order. Everything's grounded for the emergency."

He might have known it, Caquer thought. But what about the special investigator coming from the Co-ordinator's office? "Are incoming ships still permitted to land?" he inquired.

"Permitted to land, but not to leave

again without special order," answered the voice.

"Thanks," Caquer said. He clicked off the screen and went out into the dawn, outside. There was a chance, then. The special investigator might be able to help.

But he, Rod Caquer would have to intercept him, tell him the story and its implications before he could fall, with the others, under the influence of the Vargas Wheel. Caquer strode rapidly toward the terminal. Maybe it was too late. Maybe his ship had already landed and the damage had been done.

Again he passed a knot of people gathered about a frenzied speaker. Almost everyone must be under the influence by this time. But why had he been spared? Why was not he, too, under the evil influence?

True, he must have been on the street on the way to the police station at the time Skidder had been on the air, but that didn't explain everything. All of these people could not have seen and heard that visicast. Some of them must have been asleep already at that hour.

Also he, Rod Caquer, had been affected, the night before, the night of the whispers. He must have been under the influence of the wheel at the time he investigated the murder—the murders.

Why, then, was he free now? Was he the only one, or were there others who had escaped, who were sane and their normal selves?

If not, if he was the only one, why was he free?

Or was he free?

Could it be that what he was doing right now was under direction, was part of some plan?

BUT no use to think that way, and go mad. He would have to carry on the best he could, and hope that things, with him, were what they seemed to be.

Then he broke into a run, for ahead was the open area of the terminal, and a small space-ship, silver in the dawn, was settling down to land. A small official

speedster—it must be the special investigator. He ran around the check-in building, through the gate in the wire fence, and toward the ship, which was already down. The door opening.

A small, wiry man stepped out and closed the door behind him. He saw Caquer and smiled.

"You're Caquer?" he asked, pleasantly. "Co-ordinator's office sent me to investigate a case you fellows are troubled with. My name—"

Lieutenant Rod Caquer was staring with horrified fascination at the little man's well-known features, the all-too-familiar wart on the side of the little man's nose, listening for the announcement he knew this man was going to make—

"—is Willem Deem. Shall we go to your office?"

CHAPTER VII

Wheels Within the Wheel

SUCH a thing as too much can happen to any man!

Lieutenant Rod Caquer, Lieutenant of Police of Sector Three, Callisto, had experienced more than his share. How can you investigate the murder of a man who has been killed twice? How should a policeman act when the victim shows up, alive and happy, to help you solve the case?

Not even when you know he is not there really—or if he is, he is not what your eyes tell you he is and is not saying what your ears hear.

There is a point beyond which the human mind can no longer function sanely with proper sense as when they reach and pass that point, different people react in different ways.

Rod Caquer's reaction was a sudden blind, red anger. Directed, for lack of a better object, at the special investigator—if he was the special investigator and not a hypnotic phantasm which wasn't there at all.

Rod Caquer's fist lashed out, and it met a chin. Which proved nothing except that if the little man who'd just stepped out of the speedster was an illusion, he was an illusion of touch as well as of sight. Rod's fist exploded on his chin like a rocket-blast, and the little man swayed and fell forward. Still smiling, because he had not had time to change the expression on his face.

He fell face down, and then rolled over, his eyes closed but smiling gently up at the brightening sky.

Shakily, Caquer bent down and put his hand against the front of the man's tunic. There was the thump of a beating heart, all right. For a moment, Caquer had feared he might have killed with that blow.

And Caquer closed his eyes, deliberately, and felt the man's face with his hand—and it still felt like the face of Willem Deem looked, and the wart was there to the touch as well as to the sense of sight.

Two men had run out of the check-in building and were coming across the field toward him. Rod caught the expression on their faces and then thought of the little speedster only a few paces from him. He had to get out of Sector Three City, to tell somebody what was happening before it was too late.

If only they'd been lying about the outgoing power beam being shut off. He leaped across the body of the man he had struck and into the door of the speedster, jerked at the controls. But the ship did not respond, and—no, they hadn't been lying about the power beam.

No use staying here for a fight that could not possibly decide anything. He went out the door of the speedster, on the other side, away from the men coming toward him, and ran for the fence.

It was electrically charged, that fence. Not enough to kill a man, but plenty to hold him stuck to it until men with rubber gloves cut the wire and took him off. But if the power beam was off, probably the current in the fence was off, too.

It was too high to jump, so he took the chance. And the current was off. He

scrambled over it safely and his pursuers stopped and went back to take care of the fallen man beside the speedster.

Caquer slowed down to a walk, but he kept on going. He didn't know where, but he had somehow to keep moving. After a while he found that his steps were taking him toward the edge of town, on the northern side, toward Callisto City.

But that was silly. He couldn't possibly walk to Callisto City and get there in less than three days. Even if he could walk across the intervening roadless desert at all. Besides, three days would be too late.

He was in a small park near the north border when the significance, and the futility, of his direction came to him. And he found, at the same time, that his muscles were sore and tired, that he had a raging headache, that he could not keep on going unless he had a worthwhile and possible goal.

HE SANK down on a park bench, and for a while his head was sunk in his hands. No answer came.

After a while he looked up and saw something that fascinated him. A child's pinwheel on a stick, stuck in the grass of the park, spinning in the wind. Now fast, now slow, as the breeze varied.

It was going in circles, like his mind was. How could a man's mind go other than in circles when he could not tell what was reality and what was illusion? Going in circles, like a Vargas Wheel.

Circles.

But there ought to be some way. A man with a Vargas Wheel was not completely invincible, else how had the council finally succeeded in destroying the few that had been made? True, possessors of the wheels would have cancelled each other out to some extent, but there must have been a last wheel, in someone's hands. Owned by someone who wanted to control the destiny of the solar system.

But they had stopped the wheel.

It could be stopped, then. But how? How, when one could not see it? Rather, when the sight of it put a man so com-

pletely under its control that he no longer, after the first glimpse, knew that it was there because, on sight, it had captured his mind.

He must stop the wheel. That was the only answer. But how?

That pinwheel there could be the Vargas Wheel, for all he could tell, set to create the illusion that it was a child's toy. Or its possessor, wearing the helmet, might be standing on the path in front of him at this moment, watching him. The possessor of the wheel might be invisible because Caquer's mind was told not to see.

But if the man was there, he'd be *really* there, and should Rod slash out with his sword, the menace would be ended, wouldn't it? Of course.

But how to find a wheel that one could not see? That one could not see because—

And then, still staring at the pinwheel, Caquer saw a chance, something that might work, a slender chance!

He looked quickly at his wrist watch and saw that it was half past nine which was one half hour before the demonstration in the square. And the wheel and its owner would be there, surely.

His aching muscles forgotten, Lieutenant Rod Caquer started to run back toward the center of town. The streets were deserted. Everyone had gone to the square, of course. They had been told to come.

He was winded after a few blocks, and had to slow down to a rapid walk, but there would be time for him to get there before it was over, even if he missed the start.

Yes, he could get there all right. And then, if his idea worked. . . .

It was almost ten when he passed the building where his own office was situated, and kept on going. He turned in a few doors beyond. The elevator operator was gone, but Caquer ran the elevator up and a minute later he had used his picklock on a door and was in Perry Peters' laboratory.

Peters was gone, of course, but the goggles were there, the special goggles with the trick windshield-wiper effect

that made them usable in radite mining.

Rod Caquer slipped them over his eyes, put the motive-power battery into his pocket, and touched the button on the side. They worked. He could see dimly as the wipers flashed back and forth. But a minute later they stopped.

Of course, Peters had said that the shafts heated and expanded after a minute's operation. Well, that might not matter. A minute might be long enough, and the metal would have cooled by the time he reached the square.

But he would have to be able to vary the speed. Among the litter of stuff on the workbench, he found a small rheostat and spliced it in one of the wires that ran from the battery to the goggles.

THAT was the best he could do. No time to try it out. He slid the goggles up onto his forehead and ran out into the hall, took the elevator down to street level. And a moment later he was running toward the public square, two blocks away.

He reached the fringe of the crowd gathered in the square looking up at the two balconies of the Regency building. On the lower one were several people he recognized; Dr. Skidder, Walther Johnson. Even Lieutenant Borgesen was there.

On the higher balcony, Regent Maxon Barr was alone, and was speaking to the crowd below. His sonorous voice rolled out phrases extolling the might of empire. Only a little distance away, in the crowd, Caquer caught sight of the gray hair of Professor Gordon, and Jane Gordon's golden head beside it. He wondered if they were under the spell, too. Of course they were deluded also or they would not be there. He realized it would be useless to speak to them, then, and tell them what he was trying to do.

Lieutenant Caquer slid the goggles down over his eyes, blinded momentarily because the wiper arms were in the wrong position. But his fingers found the rheostat, set at zero, and began to move it slowly around the dial toward maximum.

And then, as the wipers began their frantic dance and accelerated, he could see dimly. Through the arc-shaped lenses, he looked around him. On the lower balcony he saw nothing unusual, but on the upper balcony the figure of Regent Barr suddenly blurred.

There was a man standing there on the upper balcony wearing a strange-looking helmet with wires and atop the helmet was a three-inch wheel of mirrors and prisms.

A wheel that stood still, because of the stroboscopic effect of the mechanized goggles. For an instant, the speed of those wiper arms was synchronized with the spinning of the wheel, so that each successive glimpse of the wheel showed it in the same position, and to Caquer's eyes the wheel stood still, and he could see it.

Then the goggles jammed.

But he did not need them any more now.

He knew that Barr Maxon, or whoever stood up there on the balcony, was the wearer of the wheel.

Silently, and attracting as little attention as possible, Caquer sprinted around the fringe of the crowd and reached the side door of the Regency building.

There was a guard on duty there.

"Sorry, sir, but no one's allowed—"

Then he tried to duck, too late. The flat of Police Lieutenant Rod Caquer's shortsword thudded against his head.

The inside of the building seemed deserted. Caquer ran up the three flights of stairs that would take him to the level of the higher balcony, and down the hall toward the balcony door.

He burst through it, and Regent Maxon turned. Maxon now, no longer wore the helmet on his head. Caquer had lost the goggles, but whether he could see it or not, Caquer knew the helmet and the wheel were still in place and working, and that this was his one chance.

Maxon turned and saw Lieutenant Caquer's face, and his drawn sword.

Then, abruptly, Maxon's figure vanished. It seemed to Caquer—although he knew that it was not—that the figure

before him was that of Jane Gordon. Jane, looking at him pleadingly, and spoke in melting tones.

"Rod, don't—" she began to say.

But it was not Jane, he knew. A thought, in self-preservation, had been directed at him by the manipulator of the Vargas Wheel.

Caquer raised his sword, and he brought it down hard.

Glass shattered and there was the ring of metal on metal, as his sword cut through and split the helmet.

Of course it was not Jane now—just a dead man lying there with blood oozing out of the split in a strange and complicated, but utterly shattered, helmet. A helmet that could now be seen by everyone there, and by Lieutenant Caquer himself.

JUST as everyone, including Caquer, himself, could recognize the man who had worn it.

He was a small, wiry man, and there was an unsightly wart on the side of his nose.

Yes, it was Willem Deem. And this time, Rod Caquer knew, it was Willem Deem. . . .

"I thought," Jane Gordon said, "that you were going to leave for Callisto City without saying goodbye to us."

Rod Caquer threw his hat in the general direction of a hook.

"Oh, that," he said. "I'm not even sure I'm going to take the promotion to a job as police co-ordinator there. I have a week to decide, and I'll be around town at least that long. How you been doing, Icicle?"

"Fine, Rod. Sit down. Father will be home soon, and I know he has a lot of things to ask you. Why we haven't seen you since the big mass meeting."

Funny how dumb a smart man can be, at times.

But then again, he had proposed so often and been refused, that it was not all his fault.

He just looked at her.

"Rod, all the story never came out in the newscasts," she said. "I know you'll have to tell it all over again for my

father, but while we're waiting for him, won't you give me some information?"

Rod grinned.

"Nothing to it, really, Icicle," he said. "Willem Deem got hold of a Blackdex book, and found out how to make a Vargas Wheel. So he made one, and it gave him ideas."

"His first idea was to kill Barr Maxon and take over as Regent, setting the helmet so he would appear to be Maxon. He put Maxon's body in his own shop, and then had a lot of fun with his own murder. He had a warped sense of humor, and got a kick out of chasing us in circles."

"But just how did he do all the rest?" asked the girl.

"He was there as Brager, and pretended to discover his own body. He gave one description of the method of death, and caused Skidder and me and the clearance men to see the body of Maxon each a different way. No wonder we nearly went nuts."

"But Brager remembered being there too," she objected.

"Brager was in the hospital at the time, but Deem saw him afterward and impressed on his mind the memory pattern of having discovered Deem's body," explained Caquer. "So naturally, Brager thought he had been there."

"Then he killed Maxon's confidential secretary, because being so close to the Regent, the secretary must have suspected something was wrong even though he couldn't guess what. That was the second corpse of Willim Deem, who was beginning to enjoy himself in earnest when he pulled that on us."

"And of course he never sent to Callisto City for a special investigator at all. He just had fun with me, by making me seem to meet one and having the guy turn out to be Willim Deem again. I nearly did go nuts then, I guess."

"But why, Rod, weren't you as deeply in as the others—I mean on the business of conquering Callisto and all of that?" she inquired. "You were free of that part of the hypnosis."

Caquer shrugged.

"Maybe it was because I missed Skid-

der's talk on the televis," he suggested. "Of course it wasn't Skidder at all, it was Deem in another guise and wearing the helmet. And maybe he deliberately left me out, because he was having a psychopathic kind of fun out of my trying to investigate the murders of two Willem Deems. It's hard to figure. Perhaps I was slightly cracked from the strain, and it might have been that for that reason I was partially resistant to the group hypnosis."

"You think he really intended to try to rule all of Callisto, Rod?" asked the girl.

"We'll never know, for sure, just how far he wanted, or expected to go later. At first, he was just experimenting with the powers of hypnosis, through the wheel. That first night, he sent people out of their houses into the streets, and then sent them back and made them forget it. Just a test, undoubtedly."

CAQUER paused and frowned thoughtfully.

"He was undoubtedly psychopathic, though, and we don't dare even guess what all his plans were," he continued. "You understand how the goggles worked to neutralize the wheel, don't you, Icicle?"

"I think so. That was brilliant, Rod. It's like when you take a moving picture of a turning wheel, isn't it? If the camera synchronizes with the turning of the wheel, so that each successive picture shows it after a complete revolution, then it looks like it's standing still when you show the movie."

Caquer nodded.

"That's it on the head," he said. "Just luck I had access to those goggles, though. For just a second I could see a man wearing a helmet up there on the balcony—but that was all I had to know."

"But Rod, when you rushed out on the balcony, you didn't have the goggles on any more. Couldn't he have stopped you, by hypnosis?"

"Well, he didn't. I guess there wasn't time for him to take over control of me. He did flash an illusion at me. It

wasn't either Barr Maxon or Willem Deem I saw standing there at the last minute. It was you, Jane."

"I?"

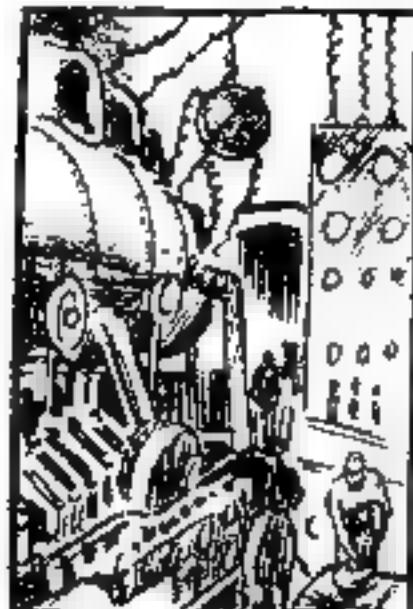
"Yep, you. I guess he knew I'm in love with you, and that's the first thing flashed into his mind; that I wouldn't dare use the sword if I thought it was you standing there. But I knew it wasn't you, in spite of the evidence of my eyes, so I swung it."

He shuddered slightly, remembering the will power he had needed to bring that sword down.

"The worst of it was that I saw you standing there like I've always wanted to see you—with your arms out toward me, and looking at me as though you loved me."

"Like this, Rod?"

And he was not too dumb to get the idea, that time.

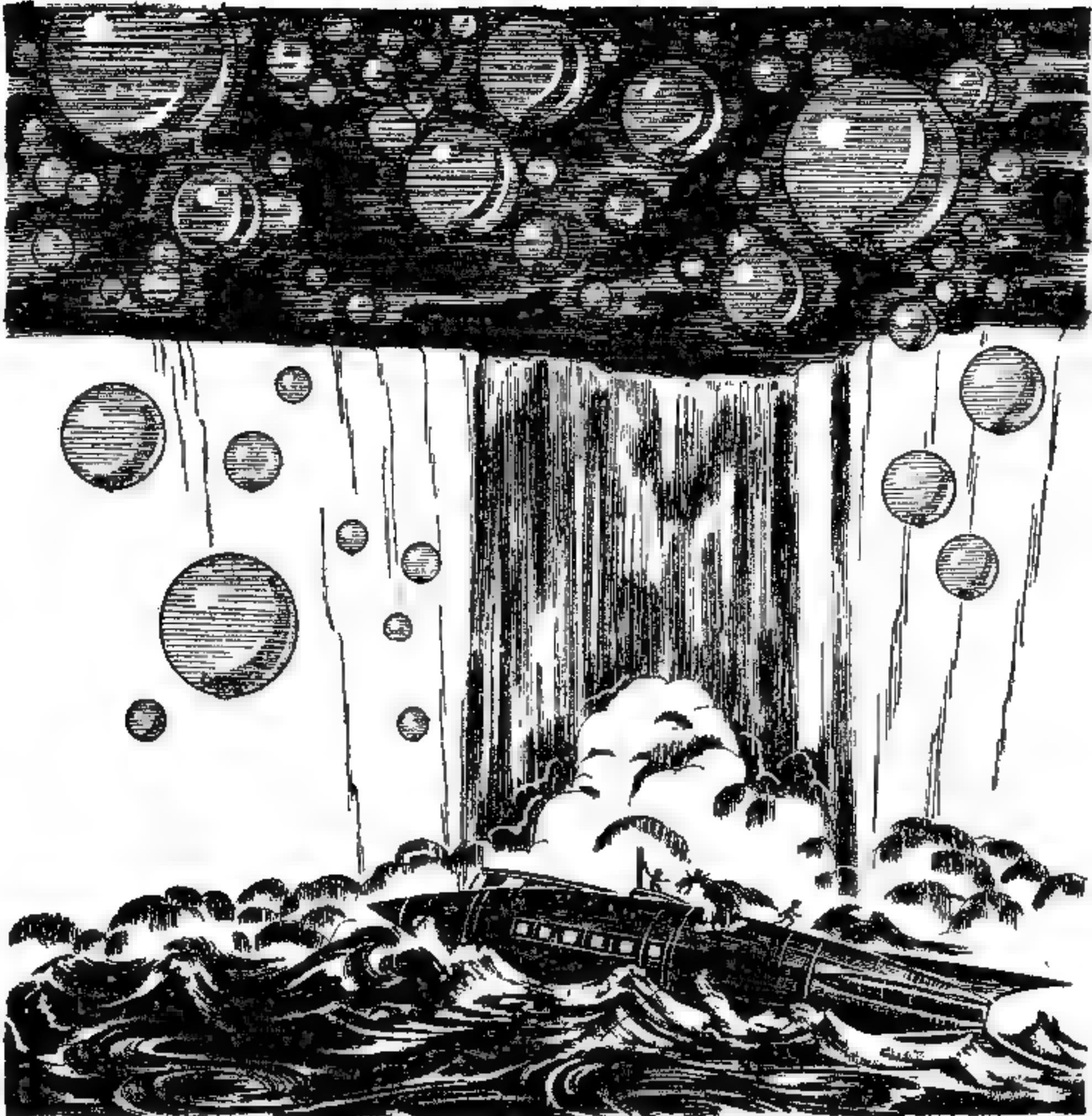


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As the cataract foamed over the ship, a staccato popping of rockets indicated a frantic effort to escape

The BUBBLE PEOPLE

By JAMES HENRY CARLISLE III

Invaded by Ruthless Enemies, the Tiny Amoeba Denizens of Mars Are Helpless Before a Deadly Threat, Until—

THE declining sun illuminated the ochre of arid Mars. Although the solar orb had not yet touched the horizon, the sky already was tenebrous with the blue-black duskiness of a fleeting twilight. Across the otherwise bar-

ren ground from either edge of the horizon, ran what seemed to be a hedge of moss-like vegetation, twenty feet across, six feet high, and geometrically straight in its edges and course. The rays of the sun were low enough to disclose under

A PRIZE-WINNING AMATEUR STORY

the hedge a small rivulet a foot broad, which was bounded by a shallow trough of sand hardened to a concrete consistency.

The rivulet swarmed with minute insect-like forms and microscopic organisms, but the largest and most conspicuous inhabitants were droplets of oily, grayish fluid, which swirled in the current and also swam against the stream, performing amoeboid-like contortions. As soon as the last rays of light reached them, they stirred to incipient activity as if throwing off a torpor engendered by the shade of the vegetation which panoplied them and the stream from the desiccative influence of mid-day.

Gradually from each oily drop no larger than a quarter-inch, there grew a bubble which enlarged to six inches diameter. The rays of the setting sun, breaking through the gap between hedge and ground, elicited a dazzling chromatic display of coruscation and opalescence on the surface of the watery spheres as though to make amends for the dingy gray of the hueless Martian twilight.

The bubbly bodies glided gently on the stream and upon colliding with pebbles bounced through the air in graceful arcs. Occasionally a sphere vibrated to produce a sound similar to that audible when a rubber balloon is pinched. This sound was in fact conversation, and these ballooning amoebas, as they might be called, were highly intelligent despite their simple appearance.

As the swift darkness came, the spheres emerged from underneath the thicket, and capered and gyrated in the tranquil air. Each bubble was now visible only by the twin reflections of the two moons, Phobos and Deimos, giving an illusion in the star-stippled sky of dancing double stars.

THE temperature had dropped below freezing, and though the spheres seemed unaffected by this, filmy, fern-like growths of frost formed on each, causing the reflections of the moons to become diffused glimmers, scintillating

with profuse iridescence.

During the progress of the night, most of the spheres gamboled far and wide. One sphere, however, did not go far from the rivulet, which formed a very small branch of the great canal system. This sphere moved in a slow, dignified glide for it was evidently an important personage among its kind.

By midnight a far-off, roaring sound was heard and the spheres slowed down, huddling near the dignified member who became motionless. After a minute the sound ceased and did not resume. In an hour's time the bubble people still moved, but with caution manifest in their restricted radius of movement.

Suddenly a bubble swept into their midst, its subdued, strident humming eloquent of alarm. Straightaway it approached the leader and vibrated its message.

"O Leader Tek! I have found something which may be danger for us all. At midnight, I wandered over to the Jutting Cliff. A roaring sound rocked the ground for a minute. Out of the sky, from the setting sun, came a monstrous black vehicle, which swooped ominously to the ground at the foot of the cliff, with fire blazing forth from one end. A light beam from the other end swept the ground before it landed.

"Then out of the black, pointed mass, which was a hundred feet long, came creatures seven feet tall. Their bodies were irregular, black masses like a jagged rock, and they moved over the ground by means of seven tentacles, each four feet long. Several times they used three of their tentacles to pick up rocks ten feet thick, which they carried without seeming to mind the effort, while we, with our bubble organs, can hardly carry more than a grain of sand. They talked with some kind of chugging sound which I could not understand, but I could repeat it for you."

"Repeat what you heard," responded Tek. This was done.

"Thank you, Teekein, for this warning," commented the leader. You were brave to not leave until you had observed them closely. I shall go to the

Wise Ones at our capital, Akgord, and repeat to them what you said. Possibly they can translate the language. Meanwhile, you and three others keep watch, using the sphere state if necessary. But I forbid that any of the others of this region should leave the sphereless, amoeboid state except to save life, until I return two days hence. Remain in the stream under the shelter of the thicket, all of you, except Teekin and these three others."

Then the leader dived upon the sur-

canals divided the oasis into four quadrants which were visited by innumerable bubbles.

Here was a city of buildings composed of colored, translucent plastic. The edifices were comparable in size to the suburban homes of an Earth city, but the architecture completely avoided rectangular or circular forms. The designs evidently utilized the higher mathematical curves combined with each other by formulas to please a scientific eye. It was also evident that these an-

Meet the Author of "The Bubble People"



J. H. Carlisle III

I WAS born in Spartanburg, South Carolina, on November 5 1918, amid the last throes of World War I. My ancestors came from Scotland and Ireland to South Carolina about 1818, and have been natives of this state ever since, contributing much to the cultural life thereof.

Educated in Spartanburg city schools. Received a Bachelor of Arts degree at Wofford College, Spartanburg, S. C., in 1940. Also Master of Arts degree at University of South Carolina in 1942. My majors were mathematics and astronomy.

I am the grandson and only descendant of the late Dr. James H. Carlisle, LL. D., former president of Wofford College, Spartanburg, S. C. My grandfather was a professor of mathematics and astronomy there before he became president, and he wrote a textbook on astronomy, "The Young Astronomer."

I still have his three-inch astronomical telescope. Although he died before my birth, my parents succeeded in bringing me up in the atmosphere of his love for books and writing, mathematics and astronomy.

My greatest pleasures are browsing through the literary pastures of libraries, and scanning the enthralling night panorama of the skies with my telescope.

I contributed quite a few essays to high school periodicals, and was a contributing editor for my college journal.

In 1929 Paul's illustration for "The Onslaught from Venus" by Frank Phillips attracted my attention to the old WONDER STORIES and made me an ardent reader of this magazine ever since.

As I have gazed at the quivering, orange image of Mars I have naturally speculated on the forms of life it could hold. Actual sight of its greenish patches convinces me of vegetation at least. This story, my first to appear in a nationally circulated magazine, is the result. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

—JAMES HENRY CARLISLE III.

face of the stream, burst his bubble, and floated, a drop of oil, upon the swift current to the great confluence of canals that is Akgord, capital of Mars.

Akgord was situated within the bounds of an elliptical forest of low Martian shrubs known to Earth astronomers as the Solar Lake or "Eye of Mars." Three hundred miles broad and five hundred miles long, it was intersected by two double canals which crossed it, while a number of other canals touched the borders. The double

canal structures were once intended for the use of beings comparable to Earthmen in size. Now they were mainly museums through which the Bubble People glided in colorful array on inspection visits.

SOON Tek entered one of these buildings by means of a stream which passed into a shallow pool situated in a vast, elliptical court. The roof and walls were of clear, transparent plastic, upon which had been painted murals of an-

cient Martian life done by means of translucent paint. Most of the Martians who entered aligned themselves in parallel rows before a group of fifty on a dais, whose spheres were deep red, signifying that they were the Wise Ones. One sphere was white. This was Telga, President of Mars, who now began to address the expectant assembly.

"Brethren, most of you have come to ask our blessing upon your Divisions, as required by our customs and religion," he said. "According to our immemorial practice, I will relate the history of our race.

"Ten thousand Martian years ago, our people had bodies averaging five feet tall. Their lungs were highly elastic and provided with special organs to supercharge the thin air they breathed. Two arms and two legs on each body were provided with three fingers or three toes each. Three eyes, four nostrils, and one mouth were on a cylindrical, hairless head.

"A pair of wings on the back had already become useless because of the thinness of the air. There were few wild or domestic animals because of the growing scarcity of water. Illustrations of this life can be seen on the walls around us. Our scientific development was at its summit and the neighboring planets had just been visited by our explorers.

"A great conclave of scientists and leaders met to consider the plight of our people due to drought. The problem of conserving the water of the planet itself, while great enough, was comparatively easy for the engineers of that day as the magnificent network of canals testifies to for all time. Only ten years were required for their construction. But there was another and much harder problem, which was to reduce the consumption of water with the least discomfort to intelligent life.

"This was a problem for the biologists and a weighty matter too. To settle on the other planets was ruled out as unethical then because it would bring us into conflict with their primitive forms of intelligent life. We probably could

not have survived anyway. The solution found at last by the biologists, I believe, shall always rank with the greatest achievements of intelligence anywhere in the universe.

"The bodies of all living creatures on the Earth and Mars are composed of nearly two-thirds water. Some tissues, such as the brain, have as high as ninety-eight per cent water. The suggestion was raised that a saving could be effected by eliminating various bodily organs. This was quite possible and had already been done on a small scale, but the conclave was not satisfied.

"The suggestion was made that the whole brain could be removed from the body and placed in a case capable of locomotion and provided with nutrient solutions and artificial sensory organs. Such a non-living case, however, would not be adaptable to its environment, and the problem of feeding and reproducing the brain would be awkward enough.

"The great brain specialist Takk won immortal fame by his astounding proposal. He pointed out that if an entire brain were separated alive from its body, then most of the brain would in fact be useless since the majority of brain matter was concerned with the control of body organs. Pure thinking was confined to the thin, gray layer of the cortex only one-tenth of an inch thick, which covered the folds of the cerebrum. And even much of this was engaged in linking the centers of intelligence with the motor and sensory cells of the brain.

"Takk proposed that the brain removed from the body should be stripped of all the unnecessary nervous matter acquired during eons of evolution for the control of the body. The remaining portion would be so small that it could be provided with a body from one of the lower forms of water life, and would need only a drop or two of water a day."

A MOVEMENT of excitement rippled through the assembly.

"This suggestion was adopted and for five hundred years every Martian was entrusted with the study of the func-

tions of an assigned minute portion of the brain," went on the speaker. "After generations of effort the proper procedure was developed. The larger forms of life that would consume much water and be dangerous to future Martians were exterminated. Each Martian had his brain extracted. The brain was dissected until only the cells necessary for rational reflection remained.

"These were immersed in a drop of living, oily liquid, which had been the body of a large, common, Martian amoeba. The power to secrete a clear, bubble-like membrane was given. This membrane, filled with buoyant gas, served for locomotion and communication, and was more sensitive to light and sound than eyes and ears.

"Thus we Martians have attained the highest state of intelligence by a paradoxical return to the simplicity of life's beginning. We are freed from the hunger, passions, and fatigue of a large body. Drifting along the streams, we need not erect shelters. There is no desire for war, nor ability to make it. We reproduce by simple division of our bodies into two pieces, each of which retains all the memories and knowledge possessed by the other at the moment of division, and to a decreasing extent, the memories of remoter ancestors at the times of their divisions in the family chain.

"This simplifies enormously the problem of education, and has greatly reduced intellectual strife. The theories of philosophy and metaphysics developed by our ancestors are far better understood than they would be if we learned them through our senses alone. There is no disease or death by old age, and no creature to devour us, so that we are immortal except for rare accidents. Nor is Mars as senile as it seems, for our bodied ancestors diverted underground many streams and lakes to replace the water vapor that is lost in space. Our main loss has been the pleasures of body appetite and the ability to use tools and instruments of science.

"Some of you before me have been given permission to divide now into two

individuals. By Martian law therefore, having been told the history of your present bodily states before me and the Wise Ones, you are hereby entitled to be two where before there was one."

AT ONCE the parallel rows of spheres before the dais split asunder, doubling the number of rows. Then row by row they slowly floated out.

A dozen, including Tek, who had not taken part in the Division now approached the Wise Ones on business. Tek drew near Telga, contracting his bubble slightly in respect. Then he described the ominous visitors and repeated their meaningless conversation.

"Can you interpret this language?" asked Telga of one red sphere who was the Specialist In Languages.

"Yes. It is Venusian. Of course Tek could not reproduce it exactly, and there has been a great corruption of this tongue since our forefathers visited Venus ten thousand years ago. After a few minutes of thought, I think I will be able to give a sensible gist of it."

Everyone waited in silence for ten minutes until the Specialist resumed.

"The Venusians," he said, "have solved the problem of space flight, but their planet is so covered by seas of strong formaldehyde solutions that there are not enough metals available to build more than one space ship. So they constructed one ship out of all the metal they had and set out for the Earth and Mars to seek more metal. When they neared Earth's surface at night, they were attacked by flying machines spouting metal pellets, and from the ground explosive objects were hurled at them.

"They became terrified, thinking that the Earth people had expected them, and continued their journey straight to Mars. It is likely that the stupid Venusians blundered into an Earth war, and that the Earth people do not realize their good fortune. The Venusians will take away a shipload of any metal they find here on Mars. Then they will make more space ships and overrun our world and the Earth."

THEIR Specialist In Biology added his share. "They will prefer to wade in the canals to obtain parts of the automatic metal pumps and locks," he said. "Their secretions will then destroy most of the life in the water including Martians."

"Akgord with its museums of our past would be a Paradise of loot for them," ejaculated Tek, "after they had wrecked the canal system."

With a worried inflection in the sound of his voice, President Telga spoke.

"What can we do?" he asked. "These monsters are tenfold stronger than our bodied ancestors, and we are mere thinking drops of oil suspended from frail bubbles, to whom a grain of sand is a heavy burden."

"Did our ancestors foresee the possibility of an interplanetary invasion of Mars when they made provision for our present bodies?" inquired Tek.

"They thought of it but did not believe it possible," a Specialist In Anthropology answered. "The interplanetary expedition of ten thousand Martian years ago found all the planets lifeless except ours, Earth, and Venus. The one species of intelligent life on Earth was still in the stone age, and the reasoning species of Venus was only a little more advanced. Since it took Mars over a million years to progress from the stone age to space flight, it was assumed by our ancestors that there was little likelihood of danger from the other planets during the remaining years of life on this world. But it seems that civilization on those planets has progressed a hundredfold faster than expected."

"Can you explain that?" asked Telga.

"Well, partly perhaps. Here is the theory I have formed during this discussion.

"The expedition discovered on the Earth large concentrations of the metallic elements in the rocks of great elevations of land. As the Earth cooled, it shrank, raising up mountain folds. In many cases rock was heated and liquefied by the foldings and driven towards the surface. Upon cooling, this molten

rock often precipitated nearly pure metallic elements, or simple compounds of them in crystalline forms. This process is still going on for the expedition nearly came to a disastrous end from an explosive outpouring of molten rock. Another important fact is that many of the plants on the Earth are capable of combustion.

"Venus, because of its proximity to the Sun and its dense clouds, has a slower loss of heat. Hence its shrinkage is less than the Earth's so that it has fewer elevations and therefore very few metal deposits. The Earth's organic—carbon—compounds are confined to its living matter and its seas are water, but Venus is covered with seas of living and non-living organic compounds in a state of constant chemical activity. Venus' atmosphere is loaded with carbon dioxide and crystals of formaldehyde compounds. Our astronomers believe that Venus' atmosphere was originally of ammonia and methane like the atmospheres of the major planets. This suggests that Earth and Mars may have had together a different origin from that of Venus and the other planets, since Earth and Mars have atmospheres of oxygen and nitrogen.

"Being smaller and farther from the Sun, Mars cooled so quickly that its mountain forming ceased early enough to give erosion time to completely level its surface, except for low sand dunes. There are no metal deposits in our world that can be mined. The metals can be extracted only from the infinitesimal amounts evenly distributed through the uniform sands of Mars. Our organic life has always been scanty because of the scarcity of both carbon and water. The absence of molten rock, which contributes water and carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, is the chief cause of this. Martian plants have never been naturally combustible because of their high silica content."

PAUISING for a moment, the specialist stared at the other scientists.

"The stone age peoples of Earth and Venus early discovered fire, while the

Martians were compelled to be ignorant of it much longer," he continued. "The Earth peoples discovered metals early when their fires melted rock ores. As a result, in a few thousand years, they were able to develop inorganic chemistry and perhaps the use of electricity. The Venusians had less access to inorganic materials, but they specialized in organic substances, particularly plastics, which abound naturally in their formaldehyde-laden seas. It seems that they have discovered an organic fuel for space-flying before the Earthians.

"The Martians, lacking metals, and having no natural source of fire, might never have left the stone age if there had been no *tigoo* plant. As you know, this plant stores the solar radiation it receives, and liberates the energy in the form of heat from its stem and roots at night. It prevented the freezing of Mars' shallow lakes then, just as its growth in our canals permits us to travel by water in the cold nights of this later age. Finally someone found a way to extract the essence *tigophon* from the plant. Fifty times more effective than chlorophyll, after a day's exposure to the sun it will liberate enough heat to boil water. Boiling water separates silica from Martian plants so that they can burn. This discovery ended Mars' prolonged stone age and began its chemical age.

"Plastics marked the beginning of Venusian science; they will be a middle stage in Earth progress; they were the climax of Martian culture.

"The Venusians now threaten us, and the Earthians may come later since they are most fortunate in resources for space-flight. The Earth people, like their planet, are physically kin to Mars, and we have little that they would want, so they might not come as enemies. The Venusians, however, are a certain menace; but if we could destroy those that have just arrived, no others would be able to come later."

"How can we accomplish that?" responded Tek.

"That is not apparent," spoke Telga after a few moments of silence. "May

I suggest this: Let Tek return to Jutting Rock to observe the Venusians. I move that the Assembly Of Wise Ones suspend the Right of Mental Privacy, which forbids telepathy. Then two assistants skilled in telepathy can go with Tek to keep him in touch with us, and to summon speedily all Mars to his aid if he should find that necessary and feasible."

This was at once agreed upon, and within an hour, Tek with his assistants had departed from Akgord.

MOST of the canals have each a parallel companion, the currents in each pair flowing oppositely. Tek's party returned by a branch five miles from the one which had brought him to Akgord. Teekein at once reported to Tek.

"They have seized the pumps of an eastern canal and caused it to dry up. Their ship remains beneath the rock, and they stay in it at night, coming out only during the day. They seem to want only metal, so they have not bothered our canal since it has no pumps near here."

Under the safe shelter of darkness, Tek and Teekein cautiously observed the Venusians as they entered their ship in the evening. The seven tentacles of each invader were obviously the best possible adaptation of members to the needs of intelligence and of a marine environment. Just above the two eyes, each Venusian had a transparent, horn lens, which projected a green beam of light, which to an Earthman would have illuminated the path for fifty feet.

The more sensitive eyes of the Venusians and Martians saw the beams extend five hundred feet, which was obviously needed on cloudy, moonless Venus, where the nights are weeks long. The Venusians came back loaded with the spoils of the day, aluminum-alloy pumps, and climbed over the ship to disappear through a hatch at the top.

Carefully Tek and Teekein explored the region about Jutting Cliff, which sheltered the space ship. A dim, ancestral memory stirred in Teekein's drop

of brain, causing him to dispatch a hurried, telepathic message to the Specialist In Geology. The reply caused him to confer upon a plan with Tek and the Assembly Of Wise Ones. Permission was given to Teekin's proposal, and at once he had a telepathic message broadcast to all Mars, which galvanized the planet to action.

"We must act," exclaimed Tek, "before they have plundered a day's walk of territory; for if they should move the ship from Jutting Cliff, our chances are lost!"

Four days after the Venusians' arrival, the canals of Mars foamed with billions of expanding bubbles. Over one-half the planet's face, portions of the canals were choked by myriads of spheres swarming into the desert and back. Each bubble descended until the drop of oil that was the Martian's brain touched a grain of desert sand. Then the living balloon swelled up to the limit, until its surface, from extreme thinness, was garnished with gauzy spots of ruby, gold, and azure.

The tiny burden of sand was deposited in a specific portion of a canal, and soon many other grains had joined it until the stream was dammed. Within two days, the redistributed waters of the canals began to approach the Jutting Cliff section from the north. The space ship was just under the cliff, which faced south. The Venusians fortunately were still detained in this region by their labor upon a buried pump five miles south of the cliff.

The Venusians had left a gap in a canal north of the cliff, the current of which had gone northward. The southward advancing waters poured through this gap, and taking up old natural channels, flowed into the dry bed of an ancient lake on the plateau behind the cliff.

The Martians planted masses of *tigoo* seeds in the new channels to prevent freezing, but did not plant any seeds in the lake, so that it became a growing mass of ice throughout the fifth day.

By evening of the fifth day, the final *coup de grace* was ready for the Venu-

sians. Millions of the Bubble People hovered over the frozen lake, each holding a warm grain of *tigoo* seed. Teekin hovered over the cliff, watching the return of the invaders to their dismal black ship. As the last of the thirty-seven monsters slid into the hatch, its tentacle gave the lid a careless jerk—but the door did not entirely shut—for Teekin had thoughtfully deposited sand in the hinge.

Then Teekin sped over the mile to the lake, and gave the signal to the hovering army. Straightway, *tigoo* seeds were released upon all the lake, except for an arc near the old outlet. Immediately, the seeds sprouted with astounding celerity and pushed warm roots to the bottom. The water where they fell melted through in two hours, leaving only a fast diminishing wall of ice which blocked the exit of the pushing waters.

The ice groaned and then cracked. The fragments boomed. The uncurbed water vented its joy at release by rumbling through the bed of an ancient stream straight as a bullet toward the edge of Jutting Cliff. Teekin's ancestral memory had correctly informed him that the cliff had been a waterfall in the days before the canals.

The resuscitated cataract foamed over the ship and flooded through the gap in the hatch. Small stones and ice chips clanged against the steel bulwarks. A staccato popping from the rockets indicated the frantic crew's effort to escape, but the water was fast filling the control rooms, short-circuiting the wiring.

The edge of the cliff began to sag, the powdery dry sand quickly becoming mud. The cliff gave way and a huge boulder crunched the ship just forward of the rockets. The torrent plunged into the fractures, the water drops sparkling with rubescent shimmer in the fulgent splendor of blazing fuel tanks.

A MILE away the expectant spheres discerned an indigo flash which spired to the sky and then winked out. A moment later, the draining lake quavered from the percussion of the ground. Through the rarefied air a shrill clap

was followed by a gust of warm wind. The myriads of little reflections of Phobos and Deimos were whiffed out. Upon the ruffled lake fell a rain of sentient drops. * * *

Such is the story, just as it is still told by old Dr. Tok, a descendant of Teekin himself. Tek and Teekin were rewarded by permission, each of them, they and their descendants, to divide by fours instead of twos for eight generations. In eight generations that comes to 65,536 living descendants for each instead of the 256 there would have been by regular bisection. And each of those

remembered Tek's or Teekin's part in saving Mars—and Earth too—just as if they had been Tek or Teekin themselves!

Earthmen may think that queer. Yet, among Earthmen are persons whose minds divide into two or more selves, though in one body. Split personality, doctors call it.

Luckily Earth has no fermented tigoo juice. It is so potent that unless great care is exercised by ordinary mortals, it may ooze out of the body in the form of steam—which is not a consummation devoutly to be wished.



Next Issue's Prize-Winning Story in Our Contest for Amateurs

MOON TRAP

By JOHN FOSTER WEST

HEY--NO
ROUGH STUFF!

NOT ME!
I SHAVE WITH
STAR BLADES!

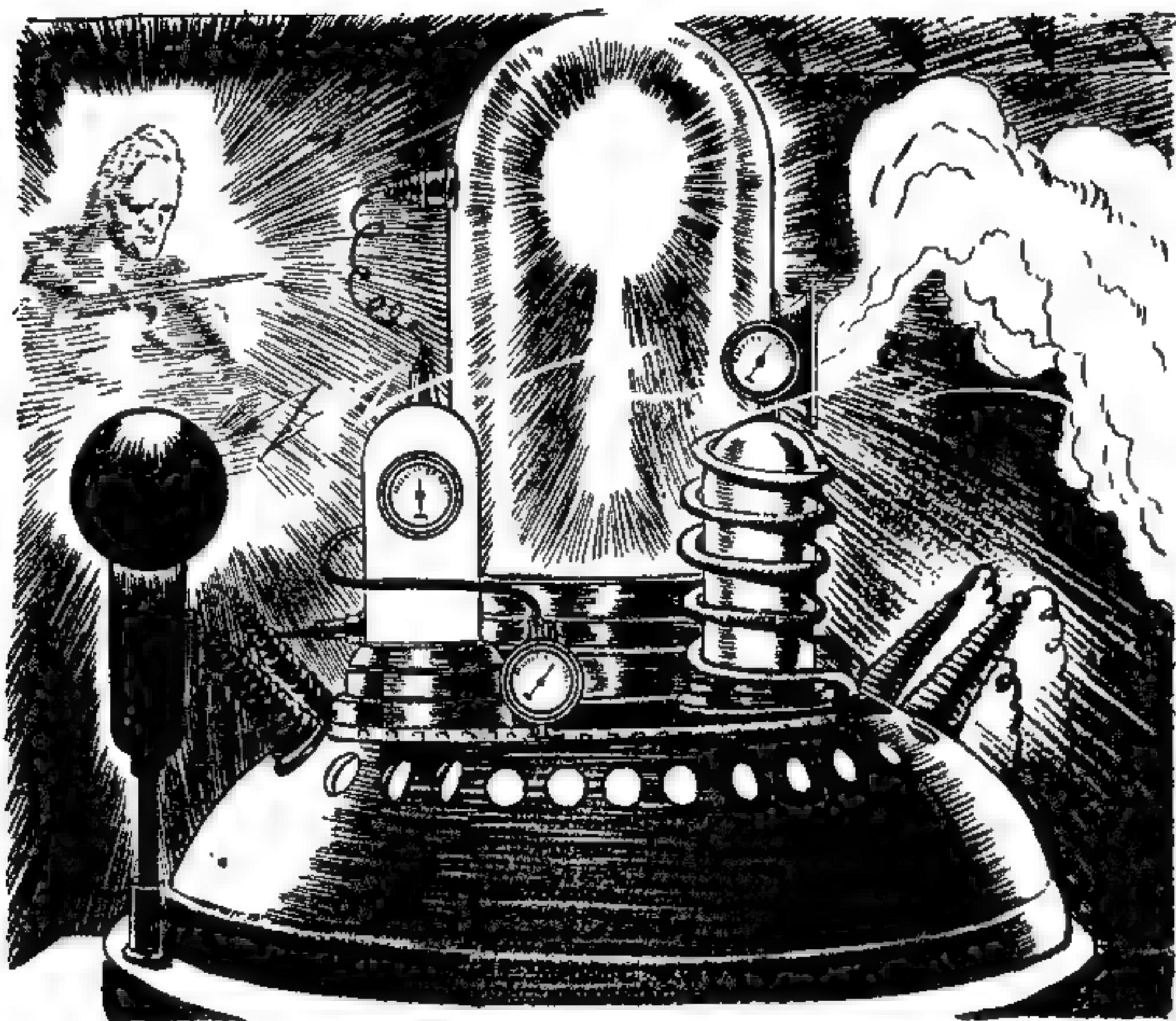
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STAR

SINGLE EDGE



THE MAN FROM THE STARS

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

Aided by a Mind-Reading Machine, Inventor James Egan Discovers a Strange Exile—and Is Whirled into Furious Conflict Against a Villainous Banker and Two Sinister Greed-Maddened Thugs!

CHAPTER I

Visitor from Afar

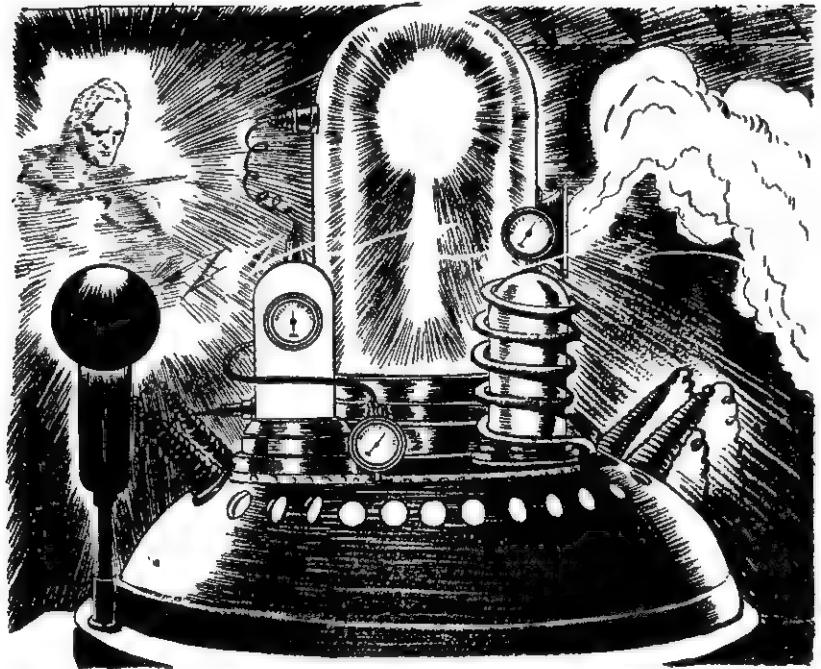
EGAN was not the first man to seek knowledge. The quest for truth is almost as ancient as the quest for food, but with Egan research had almost become a mania. The odd thing was that he remembered to eat at all, but on this particular evening, directly after dinner, he went to his laboratory. In

the kitchen he could hear Anna, his huge Negro cook, sullenly banging things around as she cleaned up the pots and pans.

Egan sat down in the laboratory and waited. He was no prophet, but he knew what was going to happen. He did not like the idea, yet so far as he could see there was nothing much he could do about it.

He did not have long to wait until Anna came padding down the hall and

A FANTASTIC COMPLETE NOVELET



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knocked on his lab door. Egan got up and opened it. She stood there, a huge mountain of a woman, her face sullen. She wouldn't come in and she wouldn't look in, either, contriving to stare into space.

"Mr. Egan, could I speak with you a minute?"

Egan sighed. Good cooks were hard to find. "Yes, Anna," he said. "You're leaving. I know."

She seemed surprised. "How did you know that?"

Egan did not bother to answer that. "I don't suppose I could persuade you to stay, Anna? I'm paying you well and the work is light. You have only me to cook for, and the housework to do, which isn't much. Good jobs are hard to find, Anna."

"I know they is, Mr. Egan," the cook said. Then she realized she was looking into the laboratory, which was something she preferred not to do, and hastily transferred her gaze back to the door. "I sho' would like to keep on working for you, but I got a cousin that's bad sick, and they's only me to take care of her. So I got to quit, Mr. Egan."

Egan let her talk. She went into great detail about her relative, telling him the nature of the disease, how far it had progressed, and what the doctor said about it. As she talked Egan was remembering something which he had known for some time, that this particular cousin she mentioned had been dead for ten years. She had invented all this as an excuse for quitting.

"What is the real reason why you are leaving me, Anna?" Egan demanded. "Don't lie. Tell me the truth."

HE DELIBERATELY made his voice harsh, whiplike, so it would cut. As he had foreseen she grew angry and threw off further pretense.

"I'm quittin' because I'm scared," she snapped. "I'm scared to stay around this house another day. There's something here, Mr. Egan, something I can't see. All the time I think there is something behind me, trying to talk to me, but when I turn around there ain't

nothing there. I'm scared, Mr. Egan, and I ain't ashamed to admit it."

As she spoke her eyes rolled wildly, showing the whites which contrasted sharply with the inky blackness of her skin.

"Ah," said Egan thoughtfully. "I have know for some time you were frightened, Anna. Can you tell me why?"

"It's because of something I can hear but can't see," answered the cook, after some hesitation.

"That's ridiculous, Anna," he said.

"It ain't either," she protested. "And if you will listen to me, you'll get away from here too. This ain't a good place to be."

"But what frightens you, Anna? Tell me about it."

She looked straight at him. "Sometimes it's you," she said defiantly. "Sometimes you know things you can't know. Like me quitting. You knew I was going to quit."

Egan grinned and shook his head. It was a weary grin and it made his thin face look boyish. "You don't need to be afraid of me, Anna."

She studied his face. "No, suh," she said. "I see it ain't you I need to be scared of. You wouldn't hurt me. You know a lot of things you ain't got no right to know, but you wouldn't hurt me."

"Then what is it?" he insisted. "You can tell me. I want to know, too."

"What's that? Mr. Egan, have you felt it too?"

Her voice was suddenly hoarse.

Egan shook his head. He did not want to put an idea into her mind, to suggest something to her. "I didn't say I have felt or heard anything, Anna. But I would like for you to tell me what you have felt or heard."

She hesitated and he urged her to speak. She tried to comply.

"It's like—" She got no further. The words went into a whisper. She was looking straight at Egan but he saw she was not seeing him. Her eyes were entirely out of focus and her attention was concentrated on something else.

"Listen!" she whispered.

Egan listened. The house was on a quiet side street where there was little traffic. It was a small town. When night came it settled down to rest. Somewhere in the block children were playing. Egan could hear them calling to each other. The time was about eight o'clock in the evening. Two or three blocks away a car honked. That was all Egan heard.

Anna's eyes were still out of focus. Looking at her, Egan had the impression she was hearing something. It was stronger than an impression. He knew she was hearing something.

"A fiddle!" she whispered. "Hear that fiddle play?"

The words were so sudden and the description so unexpected that Egan was startled. She thought she heard a violin playing! A fiddle? Only it was not, could not be, possible.

Then he heard it. It was not a violin. He knew that. No violin ever produced a note like the sound he was hearing. Far up the scale, high in the upper register, was a note. It was almost too high to be heard. And while it was not a violin, it did sound a little like one. If some super musician, with more fingers than any human has, should possess and learn to play a violin better than any Stradivarius ever built, then he might produce music such as this.

An icy chill rippled up Egan's spine.

"Anna," he said. "Where is that sound coming from?"

She did not hear him. She was already moving away. Her face was blank, and her black skin actually seemed to be turning gray. She began to run toward the kitchen. He called sharply to her but she did not stop. He heard her open and shut the kitchen door with a crash. There was a wooden fence around the back yard, with a gate.

A MOMENT later he heard the gate creak and then slam as it closed.

Egan knew he could not catch her, that she would not be able to tell him anything if he did catch her. But he could still find out what had fright-

ened her. With a quick stride he was back in the lab.

A bench ran the whole length of the room. A ham radio operator, taking one look at the instruments on this bench, would have gasped in admiration, "By George, what a receiver!" Taking a second look, he would have wonderfully asked, "But what do you get on this layout?"

Egan would have grinned at that question, and changed the subject. He could get something on that receiver all right—the electro-magnetic impulses generated within the human brain.

Using it, Egan could read minds.

His cook had wondered how he had known she was going to quit and how he had known her sick cousin was already dead. The answer was simple: he had been reading her mind, a fact of which she had no knowledge.

Egan was an electrical engineer, and a good one. His mind-reading device was a development of a piece of equipment standard in all hospitals, the encephalograph, which records the electrical pulsations taking place in the brain and is used to aid in diagnosing various mental diseases. Egan had merely taken the encephalograph and gone on from there, which was not so simple as it sounds.

He snapped the switches that fed current to the tubes. The device could be tuned just as a radio can be tuned. In fact, since each brain radiates on a slightly different frequency, it had to be tuned, but it was already tuned to the mind of the cook. Its big defect lay in its limited range, which was not over a quarter of a mile at best.

Egan slipped the helmet over his head. There were no earphones in this helmet, for the reason that the impulses recorded by this receiver were not transformed into sound and would not have made sense if they had been. Instead, the helmet was fitted with electrodes, two of which rested snugly against the temples, one under each ear, and the fifth fitted against the base of the skull.

The tubes warmed. Egan closed his eyes. His face muscles writhed. There

was no physical pain connected with the operation of this device, but since it sent the person operating it into a sort of semi-hypnotic trance, there was a definite psychic shock. He winced automatically. Then the current began to flow and he was in rapport with the mind of Anna.

She was running down the street. He could feel the pound of blood from her heart. The brain current fluctuated with each heart beat. He could also feel—he shuddered.

Fear—black, bottomless fear! Deeper, darker, more hideous than the fear of death. The blind, unreasoning fear that goes with panic.

Her thought impulses were neither clear nor coherent, her reasoning powers being completely usurped by blind, mad panic.

Egan followed her thoughts until she went out of range of his receiver. Then he cut the switches and took off the helmet.

He had not learned what he wanted to know. Something had scared his cook. For months something had been scaring her.

What was it which had driven her away?

He did not know. Yet it must have been something around this house, something which was still lurking, something which had not gone away like Anna, and he felt his flesh crawl at the thought, for he remembered a violin had played from nowhere. He, too, had heard that violin. He listened again. The violin was not playing.

Anna had sensed the menacing presence within this house. Egan went to his desk, opened a drawer and took out a flashlight and pistol. The cool feel of steel was reassuring.

GUN in one hand, flashlight in the other, he went over the house, from attic to basement, poking into the shadows, looking in every closet, searching every room. He did not know what he was looking for but he did know that his flesh crawled with dread and a subtle mistrust which he could not sup-

press. Yet he did not find anything tangible which could explain this uneasiness.

He went back to the lab.

"This is nonsense," he said to himself. "There is nothing here. Anna was just superstitious and ignorant."

He put the helmet back over his head, noticing as he did so that in laying it down he had accidentally twisted the tuning dial. He closed the switches. The tubes warmed.

A look of shocked surprise stamped itself on his face.

Thoughts were flowing through the helmet.

They were not human thoughts!

Although not the type that daunted easily, Egan had to force himself to sit there in the chair and leave the helmet on his head. Hair rose along the back of his neck and unconsciously his right hand dived into the coat pocket where he had placed the gun. Suddenly his muscles stiffened. He jerked the helmet from his head.

"Help!" he shouted.

He was halfway across the room before he caught himself. He stopped in mid-stride, forced himself to turn around and face the machine he had invented. He looked around the room. No one was there. Why had he shouted for help?

Then he realized that the impulse to shout for help had not come from him. It had come from that helmet and passing into his mind, had forced the word from his lips. His mind-reading machine worked that way. Just as a loud-speaker is part of a radio receiver, transforming into sound the electrical impulses coming through the ether, so he was a part of his mind-reading device, his own mind interpreting and transforming the impulses coming through the helmet.

Something, or someone, had shouted for help, and he had picked up the impulse. But who was calling for aid?

He put the helmet back on his head. There was a puzzle here and he meant to solve it.

"Help!" Again the thought came

quite clearly. He echoed it. It seemed to him that his own mind was telling his throat muscles to yell for help. Mental impulses were flowing from the helmet into his mind, impulses, feelings, impressions. There were no words tacked to them, he had to find the words to fit them, to take inarticulate, alien ideas and fit English words and phrases to them. And how startling those ideas were.

"Don't run—The black one—Natural telepath—She ran—Don't run—"

So the black one had been a natural telepath? That could only refer to Anna, who had said she could feel something in the house, something which she could not see. Again Egan felt the sickening impulse of terror paralyzing his body. No wonder his cook had felt frightened.

"Listen," whispered the eerie thought impulse in the helmet. "I have been trying to reach your mind, but up to now, it has not been possible. You did not tune the mind reader properly. Couldn't get through to you, except in flashes, now and then. I helped you build the mind-reader so I could talk to you, could make contact with you. Listen, I beg of you."

Egan got out of his chair then. He could not sit still any longer, for he had built this mind-reading machine all by himself. It was his own idea, strictly.

And here something was telling him the idea had come from it!

But even as he rebelled against the idea that he had had help in building the complicated device on the table, he remembered how frequently seemingly insurmountable problems had been solved in a flash by intuition. It had happened time and time again.

He sat down and once more slipped the helmet over his head.

"Please don't break the connection," the thought came. "Yes, I helped you. You had the impression it was your own idea. It wasn't. It was mine. Listen."

Fists clenched, Egan was listening.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"An exile," the answer came. "From another universe!"

CHAPTER II

Voice from Another Plane

GETTING up out of the chair, Egan yanked the helmet from his head. There was a package of cigarettes lying on the bench. He grabbed one and wasted three matches trying to light it. He was scared, but the fright did not matter for that could be controlled. He just had to have a few minutes to readjust his mental outlook to a new and startling fact—that he was in contact with an exile from another universe. A superior intellect.

Egan, as has been mentioned, was an electrical engineer, but it had been years since he had practiced his profession. He was also an inventor. Down in Washington the name of James Egan could be found scrawled on patent applications. The Egan X-ray was one of them, a device for focusing X-rays. This one patent alone would have made him a fortune, if he had wished. He wasn't interested in exploiting companies, for it was his belief that X-rays should be made available at the lowest possible cost. Hence the rights to the Egan X-ray had been released to the public.

A television system to enable plane pilots to make blind landings at night or in fogs was another patent that bore the Egan name. This one would have made him a fortune too, if he had accepted royalties. He had not. On some dark night some pilot who could not afford expensive gadgets might need his device.

There were other patents too. From them he accepted a trickle of money that was sufficient to meet his modest living expenses, but of late years, there had not been many new patents. He had been engaged in research, studying the way the universe is put together, following the mathematics of Einstein, Minkowski, Eddington, Dirac, and others, discoveries which are not patentable.

Egan calmed his imaginative faculties

which were threatening to run away with him and ticked off the sequence of events. First, for months something had been frightening his cook. Second, once or twice he himself had thought he had been aware of some alien presence in the house. Third, he had solved the problems involved in the construction of his mind-reading machine too easily. Fourth, thoughts were flowing through his helmet, non-human thoughts. Fifth, there was a voice whispering, "I am an exile."

He put the helmet back on his head. "Where are you?" he asked.

"Here, in the room with you," came the answer.

Taking a firm grip on his emotions, Egan looked around the room. "I don't see you," he said.

"No," a voice whispered in his mind. "You don't see me. I don't see you so well, either. You are only a hazy outline to me, vague, indistinct, but I can feel your thoughts and your thoughts are electrical. I also am electrical, so I can feel them."

"I would like to see you," Egan insisted.

Something sighed in his mind. "All right, although you will be able to see but little. Turn out all the lights in the room."

The engineer turned out the lights.

"Look straight ahead."

In the darkness of that silent laboratory Egan strained his eyes. Again the hair on the back of his neck was rising and chills were walking over his body as he stared. At what?

The room was as black as midnight. In that blackness something moved. Gray, indistinct, as vague as a shadow, substanceless—he was not sure he saw it. His hand went out, exploring, but touched nothing.

"You can't feel me," whispered the helmet. "I am not matter, as you know matter. How can I tell you what I am?"

Egan had the impression the entity was searching for suitable words.

"Ah! The ether. You can't see it or feel it yet you know it must exist. I am as tenuous as the ether."

Straining his eyes, Egan could see something like the thinnest of thin gray smoke hanging in the air in front of him. It looked—it looked like a ghost. The engineer felt as if his hands were freezing.

"Don't be afraid."

Egan switched on the lights. "I'm not afraid," he said. His voice was hoarse. "Tell me: when Anna was there—she was the black one who ran—I thought I heard a violin playing. Did you cause that?"

"Yes. I was trying to reach her mind and, through her, to talk to you. She is naturally susceptible to my thoughts. I wanted to tell her to tell you how to tune your receiver so we could make contact."

"You scared the wits out of her."

"She is a primitive. I did not intend to frighten her."

"Where did you come from?" Egan asked abruptly. Now that the lights were on, he was looking over the room for the gray shadow he had glimpsed, but could not see it. Apparently it was only visible in the darkness, and then barely.

"From another universe, from another space-plane-time."

SPACE-PLANE-TIME was how his mind translated the impulses.

Egan was familiar with the theories advanced by Dirac, and others, that the earth we see and feel, the sun and the stars in the sky, belong to one universe. He also knew that the same theories, and he had seen the intricate mathematics that backed them up, postulated the existence of more than one universe, of an infinity of universes, in fact. Just as space is infinite but limited, if we believe Einstein, so does an infinite number of possible universes exist, each one stacked on top of the other, each mutually interpenetrative and each mutually exclusive of all the others. This meant that, across a dimensional transit, there were worlds on top of each other, worlds without end.

"You came from another universe?" Egan said.

"Yes," the eager answer whispered

into his mind. "I am glad you understand. It is difficult, impossible, to explain. There are no words to describe the way in which I came."

"I know," said Egan. Words at best were clumsy tools. His eyes were straining through the laboratory, searching for the shadow he had seen. Something as intangible as the motes in a sunbeam moved across the room. It was gone before he could focus on it.

"How did you happen to come?" he asked. "I mean was it an accident, or were you trying to reach this world?"

"It was no accident. I was hurled here by an enemy who sought to destroy me." With the impulse there came a blaze of anger, dark and bitter. Egan caught the fleeting impression that in another universe there had been treachery, false friendship, betrayal. And he sensed also that the treachery had succeeded.

"Yes," the eager answer whispered response to his unspoken thought. "I am slowly dying. In your world I am abnormal and my strength is gradually flowing away." The whisper was forlorn, as if an elf, in a corner, were moaning he had to die.

"I'm sorry," Egan said abruptly. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to help me return to my universe. I want you to build a machine that will pierce the dimensional veil between our worlds, so I can return to my own home. I will teach you how to build the machine. I cannot build it myself because I cannot manipulate the matter of your world. Will you help me?"

The voice whispered into silence. Egan could feel the exile waiting for him to answer that question. It was an important question. The way he answered it meant life or death to the questioner.

Egan had a unique character. He was the man who would not accept royalties on an X-ray, because somebody who needed an X-ray might not be able to pay the additional cost the royalties would impose.

"Help you?" said Egan. "Of course

I'll help you. Tell me what there is to do."

IN AN instant, as he answered the question, the laboratory was alive with sound. If Anna had been present, she would have gasped, "Hear that fiddle play." The fiddle was playing, wild notes rushing joyously forth in rapturous ecstasy. Egan suspected he was not hearing the music with his ears, that it was flowing directly into his brain, but he could not miss the happiness that was in the sound. The exile was singing with joy. He had found someone to help him.

"My friend!" the whisper came. "My friend!"

"Tell me what to do," Egan repeated.

The singing violin went into silence. There was stillness while the exile marshaled his faculties. Then thoughts began to flow into Egan's mind. He closed his eyes. Little by little a mental picture began to grow up. The picture formed, took on detail, added parts, rounded itself out. It was a picture of some sort of a machine, apparently electrical. It looked like a cyclotron.

A mathematical description went with it. Egan took pencil and paper and began to write. Equations flowed from his fingers, describing the operation and construction of the machine, intricate equations, in a mathematics that he did not understand at first. It was similar to calculus, which he knew, but more involved. He asked for explanations and obtained them, and began to understand the mathematics. Later he came to realize he had been given a new system of mathematics.

Midnight arrived and he was still writing. In the small hours of the morning the equations reached an end. "Please make this machine," the exile whispered. "Make it as soon as possible."

"I'll do it," Egan answered. He studied the sketch and the equations. Yes, he could make the machine. Many of the parts were intricate, would need special tools. It would not be an easy thing to make, but he could do it.

He began to compile a list of parts he would need, so much copper, so much iron for the core of the huge magnets, so much chrome steel. So many heavy duty vacuum tubes. He nodded. The regular tubes used by the commercial broadcasting companies would work. They were expensive, but—

A sudden thought struck him, appalled him. Quickly he made an estimate of the cost of the materials and the parts that went into the machine. Tungsten, chromium, vanadium, platinum. Lots of platinum.

The total cost staggered him. The rough estimate came to over one hundred thousand dollars.

He did not have a hundred thousand dollars. His bank account had less than five thousand dollars in it. He did not have the money to build this machine.

"What is the matter?" the exile whispered anxiously. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing," Egan answered grimly. "Nothing. I'll build the machine you need."

Later in the day, as early as banking hours would permit, James Egan went to see Stephen Connors, local financial tycoon of the town. Connors rubbed his hands when he saw Egan enter. Connors was executive vice-president of the bank where Egan had his account. Both the bank and Connors, in the past, had made a pretty penny out of fees and commissions from handling the financial end of Egan's inventions. Connors had a vast respect for the money Egan had refused to accept and a vast contempt for the inventor. It was his secret opinion that Egan was a crack-brained fool.

"Good morning, Mr. Egan," Connors said, scenting a commission. "Come in and sit down. How are you today? How are the inventions coming?"

"I'm fine," Egan said. "I want to borrow a hundred thousand dollars."

The bluntness stunned even Connors.

"Uh—ah—that is." Then he got control of himself. "Why of course, Mr. Egan. Certainly. You have come to the right place. No doubt you have some new invention you want financed. If you will just give me a description of

the invention, an appraisal of its value, and an assignment of the patent rights, I'm sure the bank will be able to take care of you."

"I don't have an invention."

"What's that? No invention?"

"No," said Egan. "I just want to borrow a hundred thousand dollars."

Harrumph. Connors cleared his throat. He was thinking fast. "Of course, Mr. Egan. I misunderstood you. No doubt you wish to make a collateral loan. If you will give me a list of the securities you own, I will refer the matter to the directors."

"I don't own any securities," Egan said. "I just want to obtain a loan."

Connors choked and coughed to clear his throat. "My dear sir, do I understand you correctly?" he said. "Are you asking the bank to lend you one hundred thousand dollars on your unsecured signature?"

"Yes," said Egan. "I need the money in a hurry and I need it badly. Naturally, since I have done business with you in the past, I came to you. Can you let me have the money immediately?" Egan was an inventor, a scientist. He knew and cared nothing about finance. "I pledge you my word I will repay the money."

"How?" Connors asked.

"Through something I will invent. I have several ideas in mind."

THE banker stared at Egan.

T "Why do you need the money?" asked Connors.

"I—I can't tell you," Egan faltered. Intuitively he knew enough not to tell Connors about the exile. "I need it, that's all."

"No," said the banker.

"But I have to have it," Egan babbled. "You people have made a great deal of money out of me in the past. You can't turn me down now."

Connors could and did turn him down.

It had never occurred to Egan that he would not get the loan. He was so lost in the story of the exile and in plans for building the machine to return the exile home that he had not thought

about how he could get the money to build the machine. He almost got down on his knees and begged Connors for the loan. The banker was obdurate. "It's not good business."

"To the blazes with good business," shouted Egan, at last losing his temper. "You've got rich out of me in the past. I must have that money. It's a matter of life and death."

A bitter sneer curled the banker's thin lips. His mask was off and he saw no reason to waste further time and diplomacy on this fool. Both men had risen to their feet.

"Die, then!" snapped Connors. "Get out of here and stay out. And don't come back until you have something worth money."

With this the banker shoved Egan bodily out of the office and slammed the door, leaving him dazed and despairing in the big outer room!

CHAPTER III

Search for Money

UPON recovering somewhat from his first disappointment, Egan went to his laboratory and turned on the current of his mind-reading machine.

"I know," the exile whispered. "I followed you."

"There are other banks," said Egan grimly. "I'm going to New York."

Even on the train, as he rode to New York, Egan had an impression the intangible shadow of the exile was riding with him, urging him to hurry, hurry!

Back in town Connors was already regretting what he had done.

"Perhaps I was too hasty," he mused. "That fellow may have something good. I'd better keep an eye on him."

Egan went to three banks but at none of them was he able to get past the uniformed guards and assistants to assistants and talk to a responsible official. The banks were not interested in lending money on the unsecured signature of an inventor.

This was a new experience to Egan, but he learned fast. After all, the name of James Egan meant something in certain scientific circles in America. There was a large electrical manufacturing firm in New York that held—and made money—out of various patent rights that he had assigned to them. Egan succeeded in obtaining an interview with the president of that firm. And when he left, he had a letter of introduction to the president of one of the largest banks in New York.

The letter of introduction took him past a line of bowing assistants and awed secretaries and into the august presence of the banker himself.

"What can I do for you, sir?" the banker asked.

"I want to borrow some money," Egan said.

"Well, you've come to the right place to get it," the president said, laughing. "Lending money is our business."

"It's a rather large sum," the inventor said, hesitantly.

"We handle loans that run into millions," the banker answered.

"Oh!" Egan was greatly relieved. He had been afraid that no bank would lend him the amount of money he needed. But it pleased him to find out this firm made loans of millions. "I need a hundred thousand."

"Certainly," the president said. "We will be glad to arrange it for you, Mr. Egan."

The inventor's heart jumped at the words. He was going to get the money. "I can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate this."

"It's quite all right," the banker replied. "What are you going to use the money for?" Egan hesitated. "Oh, come, we have no secrets in business."

The banker was a celebrity, with a big, hearty, friendly, robust voice. He seemed unusually intelligent, and he must have been, to occupy the place he did in the world of finance. Also, Egan was slightly overawed by the luxury of the appointments with which the big man was surrounded.

"Do I have to tell you?" Egan ques-

tioned, his tone anxious.

"Perhaps you'd better. But have no fear that any information you may reveal here will be divulged."

"Well," the inventor said. "I need the money to build a machine to return to his home world an exile from another universe."

For a second, the face of the banker went blank. Then he leaned forward across his desk and smiled. "I'm sorry, but I didn't quite get that. Please explain at greater length."

"Certainly," Egan answered. He had been afraid to talk about the exile for fear someone would think he was out of his mind. But this banker was considered an authority on world affairs and was reputed to keep abreast of the march of science. Egan told him the whole story. "So you see, sir, the machine will be quite costly, but it will be the means of saving the life of a living creature."

"Yes," the banker answered. "I see."

"And now, sir, may I have the money immediately?"

For a second the banker hesitated. "Yes," he answered. "I will have my assistant draw up the necessary papers at once. Incidentally, Mr. Egan, I am rather fascinated with this exile of yours. Would you mind explaining in greater detail?" He pressed a button on his desk several times, using a peculiar telegraphic code.

EGAN began to retell the story, how his cook had sensed a strange presence in the house, how he had built the mind-reading machine, and how the exile had appeared. He was deep in an explanation of the co-existing universes when he heard the door open behind him. At first he paid no attention. Then he realized the banker was no longer listening to him but was looking at the door. Egan turned.

Two armed bank guards in blue uniforms stood there.

"This man is a lunatic," the banker said. "Seize him."

Before the inventor could move, the guards grabbed him, pinioning his arms,

"But—but—" Egan wildly protested.

"Get him out of here," the banker ordered.

"Shall we turn him over to the police?" one of the guards asked.

"No. He seems to be harmless enough, so the police are not necessary. Just turn him loose on the street. By George, he has strange delusions. I never heard anything funnier in my life. I could hardly keep my face straight."

As Egan was dragged from the room the banker began to guffaw with laughter and to mop his face with a fine linen handkerchief. The two guards thrust Egan out of a side door into the street. "And don't come back!" they told him. "We don't want any of you nuts around here."

Egan went back to his hotel. In the gray shadows of his room a shadow waited. He could not be certain he saw it. But he could hear a voice in his mind. "Hurry, hurry."

To help the exile he had to have money, and money was not being lent to inventors. He was learning the greater the discovery, the more revolutionary the idea, the harder it is to make other human beings listen.

There was plenty of money in New York, uncounted millions. It was the richest city of the richest nation on earth. Wealth beyond the dreams of Croesus lay about him. It would have been easy to have financed a new tie clasp or a kitchen gadget, for all men understood such things without special education. Every day vast fortunes were being made and lost. Newspapers constantly carried stories of speculators who had cleaned up on the stock market. The money that he desperately needed was here. But how to get it was a problem. More than a problem.

Suddenly Egan sat erect. A new idea had popped into his mind. Instantly he was pacing the floor. "Riches can be made on the stock market," he muttered excitedly. "Why can't I deal myself a hand in that game? Why can't I clean up on the market, especially since I can read minds?"

Another thought came which he dis-

carded at once. There were secrets here that were worth millions, more millions than could be counted. A man who could read minds could learn the combination of any vault, the manufacturing secrets of any firm. He could also learn juicy tid-bits that rich men would pay not to have known. He put the thought out of his mind. He was not a criminal or a blackmailer.

That left the stock market.

He made a hurried trip back to his laboratory. When he returned, he brought his mind-reading machine with him.

Two weeks later a gossip columnist carried this item:

What is the name of the man who has moved in among the bigshot gamblers down along Wall Street? Who is it that has eat in on the game played by the bulls and the bears, with millions at stake, and has taken the big time operators for such a ride that the financial market is gasping at the spectacle? We might whisper that his name is Egan.

We might also whisper, that in a series of daring and spectacular plunges, this small town inventor is reputed to have cleaned up close to a quarter of a million dollars within the last ten days. Nice going, Egan!

FOR once, a gossip columnist was right. Egan had cleaned up over two hundred thousand dollars. The extra hundred thousand was to pay the income tax on his winnings, for Egan had learned fast. But this was not difficult, for a man who could read minds.

When he got off his train in his home town, the first man he saw was Connors. The banker came rushing to him, grabbed his hand and began shaking it.

"Mr. Egan, I can't begin to tell you how delighted I am to see you. How are you, sir? Did you have a good trip?"

"Fair," said Egan, removing his hand from the other's grip.

"That's fine, that's fine," the banker beamed. "I should like to talk to you, at your convenience, sir."

"What about?" the inventor demanded.

Connors could not restrain his excitement. "To be frank, sir, I wanted to tell you that the bank, upon my persuasion, has reconsidered your request for a loan.

The directors are prepared to lend you any amount you find necessary."

"I don't want it," said Egan bluntly. He turned to go. The banker followed him.

"Just a minute, sir. Just a minute, Mr. Egan."

"What do you want now?" the inventor asked.

"Well, sir," Connors was perspiring. He looked around the platform to make certain that it was deserted, then leaned forward and continued the conversation in a whisper. "I—ah—read about your little killing down on Wall Street, sir. And, to be frank, my meeting you here was no accident. I have been looking forward to your return." Connors took a deep breath and plunged, "I wondered if we could go into partnership together, sir? With your inventive genius and my knowledge of the financial world, we could become the wealthiest men in the world."

"Do I look like a fool?" said Egan.

"But we could make millions, sir. With my knowledge of finance—"

"—And your abysmal ignorance of everything else," Egan supplied. "Get out of my way, Connors. I have no time to waste on you. There is work to be done."

He pushed past the banker and entered a taxicab. Connors, his face flushed with anger, watched him go.

It took Egan two months to build his machine. The parts that went into it were not coming off the end of any assembly line, and in several instances, the tools to make the parts had not even been invented. Egan had to make most of the equipment himself. He could not buy these things ready made. He worked day and night, and as he worked an intangible shadow looked over his shoulder.

He had grown accustomed to that shadow now. It was no longer alien or perturbing. It was a friend, a friend who was growing weaker daily.

"Your world is dangerous to me," the inventor's mind-reading machine whispered. "There are radiations here—light, electromagnetic waves—that

clash with my own vibrations. And I am hungry. Do you know what it means to be hungry?"

"I certainly do," the inventor answered. In his own younger days, he had gone without food. Now he had all the food he needed, but it was not food which could be shared with this strange exile. The chemicals extracted from meats and plants could not sustain the exile. His bodily needs depended upon elements not to be found anywhere on earth.

Meanwhile, like a man on a desert island, he was slowly perishing from starvation.

It was storming the night Egan completed the machine and prepared to test it. The howling winds of fall were whipping rain across the roof of the house. Black wetness mantled the world outside.

The machine looked like a cyclotron, a four-foot mass of gleaming coils and hulked housings. Everything was ready. All that was needed was to turn the current into it. Egan picked up the helmet of the mind-reading device.

"Shall I go ahead?" he asked.

CHAPTER IV

The Exile's Return

A STARTLING pulsation of eagerness flowed into James Egan's mind. Exultation, joy, glory. A condemned man, waiting in the death cell for the guards to come who sees the door open and finds they have brought, instead of death, a reprieve and full pardon, would not have been as exultant as the being whose thoughts flowed into Egan's mind.

The exile was happy.

And—the fiddle was playing. It was a thin, high, singing note, so far up the scale it was almost out of hearing. Above the moan of the wind, above the rattle of the rain on the roof, it came flooding through the laboratory, rising, falling, singing. The note was carrying

a melody, but it was not such a melody as ever before heard on earth. A master violinist playing before a hushed audience in a concert hall.

There was power in the note, surging, rising power. And exultation, such an exultation as primitive dancers know.

A slave, released from bondage, might sing as this note was singing. A traveler, lost in the desert, might sing like this when his faltering, death-dogged footsteps led him at last to water and to life.

Ears that had heard the pipes of Pan playing on the rocky headlands of ancient Greece, Orpheus at his lyre, the golden notes of the sirens—this was their music. A fiddle playing—

"Yes," the singing voice exulted in Egan's mind. "Go ahead."

He closed the switches. From somewhere within the bulked housings of the machine that looked like a cyclotron came a grunt as the current hit the field coils.

Theory indicated that immediately above the machine, in a cup-like depression where the fierce currents were concentrated, an opening should appear. This opening should resemble a window, but unlike the windows we have in our homes on earth, which open out upon our familiar world, this window should open out upon another universe. In effect, the machine dug a hole in the fabric of space itself, rending momentarily, the tenuous but extremely tough veil that separates the worlds.

As the current hit the machine it began to rumble.

Egan was watching with all eyes. Deep within his mind, he could still hear the exultant fiddle playing with so much happiness that it made him happy too. But he wanted to see and to understand everything that occurred. He saw the window begin to open.

It started as a pin-point of gray mist, then began to expand. It grew to the size of a baseball, then it was as big as a basketball. Staring at it, Egan caught one bewildering glimpse of an opening that seemed to be miles in extent, yet was less than six inches long. There was an odd telescoping effect which short-

ened incredible distances to inches. He knew this was a dimensional effect.

For several seconds, as if through a long tube, he looked into an alien universe at a city of light. Great gleaming towers of a vast city lifted into the sky, merging into the distance. Rainbow colors flashed and scintillated in blinding radiance. Red towers, blue towers, yellow towers, and a dozen other shades he could not name flickered and danced against an opalescent sky. A glory of unearthly beauty dazzled his sight.

"My world," the exile whispered in his mind.

Egan would have kept on looking, even if he blinded himself, but the window filled with mist, obscuring vision. He suspected this was caused by the congealing of the water vapor in the air.

"Thank you, my friend," came the voice of the exile. "The window is open and I am going home."

"Goodbye," Egan answered. "Goodbye."

IT OUGHT to have been a dramatic moment, this return of the exile. But there was no drama. Egan, watching, saw the mist obscuring the mouth of the tube swirl as something moved through it. That was all. The exile moved into the tube, and was gone.

Egan sighed. From somewhere in infinity a voice whispered once more.

"Goodbye," it said again.

Suddenly Egan felt lonely as he sat there by himself in the laboratory. During all the months he had worked, the inventor had been constantly aware of a friendly presence near him, a thin, almost invisible gray shadow that watched and helped him. He had grown accustomed to this presence. Now it was gone and he was lonely.

The lab was silent, except for the humming of the machine. In the night outside noisy rain ran over the iron roof and the storm beat against the windows.

With a crash the door of the room was kicked open and Egan swung around.

Clad in a dripping raincoat a man

stood there. It was Stephen Connors. One hand thrust deep into his raincoat pocket, the banker advanced into the room.

"Hello," he said.

"What the devil are you doing here?" Egan gasped. The banker had never visited him.

"I dropped in to discuss a business proposition," Connors answered.

"I have nothing to discuss with you," answered Egan. "So far as I'm concerned, the quicker you leave, the better I will like it. You weren't invited here and you aren't wanted. Get out."

Egan had just watched an event touching on the mechanics of another universe, which any true scientist would sell his soul to witness, and here Connors had come to talk business, like the sordid, warped money-grubber he was. Almost it verged on sacrilege.

"Go on, get out."

The banker did not move.

"I want to make you a proposition, Egan," he said. "You have a machine by which you can forecast what the stock market is going to do. How much do you want for it?"

Egan stared at him. "Are you insane? I have no such device."

"There is nothing to be gained by denying it," Connors answered. "I know all about that killing you made on Wall Street. I've had detectives on your trail and they discovered the office you rented, and by talking to janitors, learned that you had installed some kind of a machine in your office. You opened a trading account with a broker and immediately began to clean up. Don't try to lie to me, Egan. I know you have invented some machine that will forecast market trends."

Appalled, Egan stared at the banker. He realized what had happened. Connors had misunderstood the nature of the device Egan had invented. He thought it was a machine to forecast the market.

"You've come to the wrong place," Egan answered. "I have a mind-reading

machine, not a market-forecasting device."

"A what?"

"There it is," Egan gestured toward the apparatus assembled on the work bench. "If you don't believe me, look it over."

The banker was startled. He stared suspiciously at the assembly of apparatus on the table.

"You mean you can read minds?"

Egan nodded.

"What's that thing?" Connors pointed to the bulked housing of the machine that had been used to return the exile to his own world.

"That? Oh, that's something else." The machine was still running and the gray ball of mist was still visible, clouding the opening to the tube to infinity. The inventor started to turn it off.

He found himself looking into the muzzle of a pistol that Connors jerked from his pocket.

"Don't touch anything," the banker snapped. "Get your hands up and keep them up. I'm not taking any chances of you electrocuting me."

AS Egan obeyed the order, the banker stared at him. "So you can read minds," he said thoughtfully. "I see how anyone could clean up on the market, if you can read minds, and do a lot of other things too." His eyes shot fire. "Why, anything would become possible. If some firm is shaky, needing only a push to go to the wall, you can learn about it, and supply the push. You can learn everything they know down in Washington, the things they don't talk about. And if you have enemies, you could know every move they intended to make in advance."

There was sudden exultation in Connors' voice. "Mind reading would make me the richest man in the country. I could rule the world. Everybody else would be my slave. I would have absolute power!"

Egan was beginning to feel sick. He felt sicker when Connors laughed.

"I came in here looking for a machine that would forecast the stock market,"

the banker exulted. "Instead I find something much more valuable."

"You're forgetting one thing," the inventor interrupted. "The machine is not for sale."

"Isn't it?" The banker laughed. "Everything is for sale. How much do you want for it? Oh, you needn't think I will take advantage of you. We will be partners. I will see that you get your fair share of the proceeds."

"No," said Egan.

The gun muzzle centered itself directly on his heart. "Don't think I will hesitate to shoot," Connors said. "Not when there are millions at stake."

"You won't shoot," Egan answered. "Because without me you can't operate the machine."

"You will teach me how to operate it."

"No."

Defiantly Egan uttered the word and he meant what he said. He knew how Connors would use the mind-reading machine and he suspected what would happen if he taught the banker how to operate it.

The banker raised his voice. "Boys," he said.

The lab door opened. Two men entered. They had the hardened faces of criminals.

"I've just been waiting for a night like this," the banker told Egan. "I suspected you might act stubborn, so I waited for a stormy evening, when everyone was in bed and nobody would hear you yell." He nodded to the thugs. "He's got a secret that I want to find out. Make him open up."

The ruffians sprang over to the inventor and, before he had a chance to resist, had wrenched his arms roughly around the back of the chair.

"We know how to make him sing," snarled one. Then to Egan. "Say how would youse like it if we shoved lighted matches against yer bare feet? Or would a couple of busted ribs go better, eh?"

Egan stared up into their brutal faces. He knew he could expect no mercy from them. By a sudden effort he tore himself free, leaped to his feet and darted

toward the door. But the thugs were too active. They leaped after him.

A hand grabbed him, spun him around, slammed him against the wall.

"So you'd run out on us, huh?" a voice growled. "How do youse like dis maybe?"

Something struck him on the side of the face with stunning force. A blackjack. Stars exploded in front of his eyes. He struggled to free himself. From the other side came another wallop, heavy, cruel. The second hoodlum had produced a piece of lead pipe. Egan reeled under the combined assault.

"Help!" he shouted, striking out blindly. "Help!"

"Shout all you want to." It was Connors' mocking voice. "Nobody will hear you on a night like this." Blows, heavy savage blows, were rained on the head of the helpless inventor, who sank to the floor with blood spouting.

"Help!" Egan screamed again. He tried to cover his bleeding head with his arms.

Smack! The blackjack whammed against the other side of his face. Thud! A fist drove into his side. Biff! A heavy shoe crashed against his shin, sending lancing fires of pain up his leg. He sagged flat on floor. Again a thick-soled boot collided with his body, this time in the ribs. He heard the crack of a breaking bone.

"Help!" he gasped. His only hope was that somebody would hear him and come to investigate. He listened for running footsteps coming up the walk outside, for someone pounding on the door. But no footsteps came, no one pounded on the door.

"Keep it up, boys," Connors kept yelling. "Batter his insides out. I can hire other men to tell me how to run the machine."

Again the men began to kick him. Suddenly they stopped. "What's that?" one of them asked.

"I don't hear anything," the second said.

"All I hear is music," Connors spoke. "Probably coming from a radio. Someone playing a violin. Pay no attention

to it. Your job is to maul this crazy fool."

Egan heard it then—fiddle playing! Only there was no ecstasy in the sound now, no joyous happiness, no glorious notes. Instead there was anger, such burning bitter anger as he had never dreamed possible.

A fiddle playing!

With dazed eyes, Egan stared at the ball of mist in the cup-like depression on top of the machine which was still running in the middle of the room. Out of that ball of mist, something came. As pearl mist swirled, a gray shadow leaped out, a firmer, thicker shadow than he had seen before, a shadow that had seemingly found food, and substance. Angry pulsations darted from the misty form.

CONNORS saw the shape emerge, threw up his gun and fired. The slug drove through the shadow, whanging into the opposite wall. The shadow kept coming, and darting straight at the banker, fastened upon him, and seemed to merge into him.

Violin notes surged through the laboratory, notes mad with anger.

A dazed expression appeared on Connors' face. A shudder passed over his body. Lines of sudden pain grooved themselves in his dark countenance. The gun suddenly dropped from his hand, from fingers that no longer had the strength to hold it.

Connors screamed then, once, a sound retched from the depths of pain. A condemned felon, dropping from the scaffold, might scream thus when the fatal rope tightened around his neck. And his scream would end as quickly as this one did. It stopped, instantly.

Connors turned to run. He missed the door and ran headfirst into the wall. Gurgling, screaming, he clawed for the door, found it, blundered into the hall, ran down it. Egan heard him smash into the front door, heard the tinkle of broken glass as the man went through.

The shadow was again in the room. Again the angry notes of the violin were ringing out. One of the men screamed.

Then both of them were running from the laboratory.

Egan heard them go. Dazedly he climbed to his feet. His vision was blurred, obscured. He clung to a chair for support.

He heard the violin come back. "They will never return to bother you," the voice whispered.

"Are they dead?" Egan asked.

"No. But they have no intelligence left. I destroyed their minds."

For an instant the violin notes surged angrily. Then they softened. Kindliness and compassion crept into them. "You are hurt, my friend?"

"I'll be all right," said Egan. "But—why did you come back?"

"I felt you call for help," the exile answered. "The window was still open and I could feel the pulsations through it. You saved my life." So I returned, to help you. I have," there was grimness in the voice, "a few powers at my command."

"So I see," said Egan. "Thank you, my friend."

"Thank you," the answer came. "And now, can I help you further?"

Egan shook his head. "I'll be all right. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Something swirled, in the ball of mist. For a second the violin notes hung in the air, playing softly. Then they went into silence, into some lost infinity. Egan opened the switch. The ball of mist collapsed.

The exile was gone.

THE next day Anna returned, to nurse Egan. She went all through the house, listening and looking.

"This is a good place now," she said. "There ain't anything bad here any more."

"There never was anything bad here," said Egan. "There was something strange, something different, but never anything bad."

"Yakuni Won't Kill You! He Wants You Alive!"

DEBORAH HADLEY shrugged as she went on: "He figures you may have important information!"

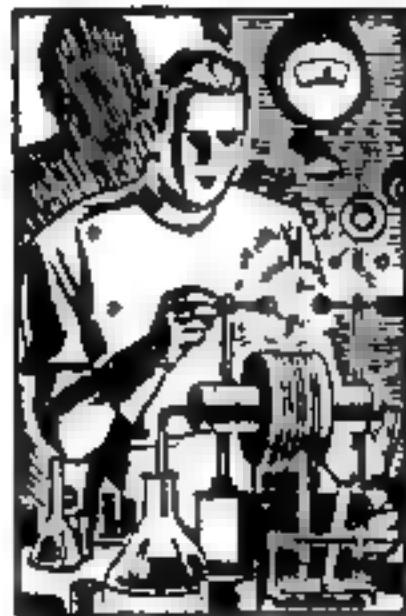


IT WAS ALL an unbelievable dream to Doctor Horace Danton—ethnologist—who suddenly found himself transported to a strange land called Myapur and accused of sabotaging a powerhouse! And yet it was real—and vibrant with peril—



THERE ARE amazing thrills galore in **A GOD NAMED KROO**, by Henry Kuttner, an astonishing novel of strange rites, malignant forces and deadly taboos in the Himalayan foothills!

Coming in the Next Issue



WONDERS OF WAR

The Role of Science in Combat on All Fronts



WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE, AND MANY A DROP TO DRINK—The plaint of the Ancient Mariner, echoed by many a shipwrecked sailor dying of thirst in the midst of salt water, is today a thing of the past. Two new chemical compounds, produced by the Navy Medical Research Institute at Bethesda, Maryland, which can be compressed into the size of bars of soap are able, with the aid of four one-quart plastic bags, to produce exactly eleven times their own weight in drinking water from sea water.

What this will mean to torpedoed seamen forced to remain in lifeboats for a period of days or weeks is almost beyond computation. It is certainly one of the scientific wonders of this war.

SMOKE SIGNALS IN TECHNICOLOR — The smoke signal, beloved of the American aborigine, has come back with a bang in this war—and in all the colors of the rainbow. In the course of the African fighting, need was discovered for some means of identification which would prevent high-flying planes from bombing their own armored forces. Painted insignia was discarded as defeating the whole purpose of camouflage and being too easy for the foe to imitate.

Colored smoke grenades are the answer. They are being supplied by the Chemical Warfare Service in the six primary and secondary colors—red, blue, yellow, green, orange and purple—as well as black and white. The code, or identifying combination of colors, can be changed daily, thus defeating any attempt on the part of the enemy to copy.

HAMMOND'S LATEST PITCH — John Hayes Hammond, Jr., of Gloucester, Massachusetts, famed marine inventor, has just taken out four new patents on variations of a variable-pitch propeller system which aims at more economical use of power in steamships. The propeller is set to function automatically at maximum efficiency regardless of external conditions, steam consumption being maintained at constant level.

DIVINING ROD FOR WOUNDED MEN—An electromagnetic method for locating metal fragments in wounds, potentially of great usefulness to surgeons operating on battle or industrial injuries, has been patented by Samuel Berman of Richmond Hill, N. Y. The inventor takes advantage of the well-known fact in physics that the current flowing through an electromagnet is modified in the neighborhood of a metallic object.

He uses a suitably covered magnet of this kind in a probe and amplifies the effects with a vacuum tube hookup.

NUT-SIZE SEARCHLIGHT HAS 65-MILE BEAM—A searchlight about the size of a walnut which projects a 1,500 candlepower beam, visible for 65 miles, has been developed by Westinghouse at the request of the Navy for standard equipment in life rafts for aviators forced down at sea. It is worn on a band around the head, is a six-watt lamp with half the bulb silvered to provide a reflector and can be wired to the small hand-cranked generator now included in life-raft equipment to provide power for radio transmission.

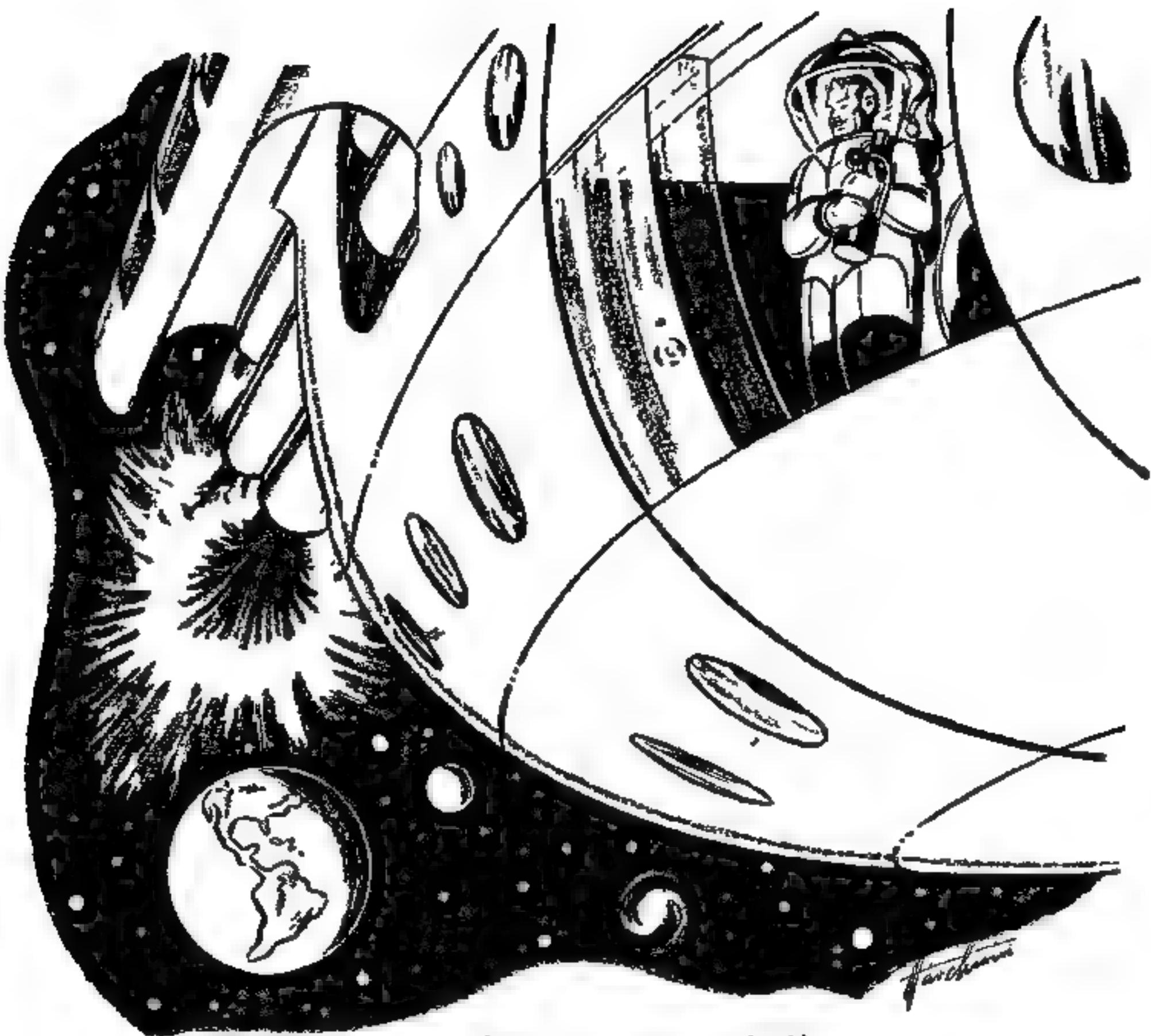
The lamp is mounted in a waterproof housing and has a life of 100 hours. It can be switched on and off to send code signals.

NAZI SOLVES PLANE FLOAT STREAMLINING—A patent, applied for before the war, was just issued in the name of Claude Dornier, Nazi plane designer, which streamlines seaplane floats by folding them up against the hull while in flight, giving the plane the general appearance of a land plane and cutting down wind resistance. When about to land, these floats simply swing outward like overstuffed doors on longitudinal hinges. It is expected that our Navy will make use of it.

NEW MOLOTOV COCKTAIL GIVES HOT-FOOT—What might be called a belly-side variant of the Molotov cocktail is the invention of Dr. Gleason L. Archer, president of Suffolk University in Boston. The device is a flat or slightly wedge-shaped container, filled with gasoline or other inflammable fluid. A tank rolling over it causes the gasoline to squirt upward through a multitude of holes drilled in the top, at the same time igniting the fluid. The resulting fire, being underneath, can be counted on to give maximum discomfort to the tank crew.

WEATHER GAGE BACK IN REVERSE IN SEA FIGHTING—In the days of Lord Nelson and Villeneuve, the weather gauge was all important in naval combat—in other words, the fleet to windward of its enemy could attack him almost at will. After a century long lapse into obsolescence, this factor has resumed its importance—but hind end to.

Aircraft carriers have done it. Now the fleet which can get its planes away against the wind has a big edge. The other fellow has to turn his carriers away from the action to get the planes in the air. As this may take an hour or more, the carrier forced to turn around may find itself sixty miles or so further from the actual scene of combat than when it went into action.



The door into outer space gaped wide

PROMOTION TO SATELLITE

By RAY BRADBURY

Obscure Pietro Wanted to Be a "Beeg" Man—But He Never Dreamed What His Heroism on a Space-Ship Would Bring Him!

THE warning came sharply.
"Watch it, you *podano*!"
Pietro Dionetti shrank back instantly as a wall of curved metal whisked past his blue-black hair and narrow face.

"Sorry!" Morgan yawped down from the tractor crane. He shoved levers and the metal swung up to a dozen men waiting to fit it into the gaping side of the rocket ship. They guided it home, and the crane released it, went away for another.

Bit by bit, the integument of the projectile grew. Hours passed and Pietro worked with the others. They shaped the

shell over a heart of dynamos and turbines and atom machines, intestinal jets, a million minute but potent organs each digesting and giving off energy. Getting a great ship ready to knock a hole in space.

Pietro heard the noon whistle blow and rode to the commissary on the monorail with Nucchi and Antonio and the others. "Santa Maria!" he vowed, "that ship she go like-a mercury. Strong as garlic. One day she is a naked skeleton. Yesterday, today, tomorrow, we give-a her clothes. And we worka like horse!"

Shoving food into his wide mouth and

talking around it, Pietro went on:

"One thing bother me. Is this— We build ship, no? We peta her and we do her up nice. Awright. But after that, what happens? You know, Nucchi, as well as I. You have seen."

He paused to load his spoon and crane it unerringly to his mouth. His black brows lifted.

"We finish her—and then comes young punk from college and he climb in and—zawooh!—off goes her and thatsa all we ever see. Yes?"

Nucchi nodded his ancient, wrinkled face over his meat.

"Nucchi, my friend, have you ever been to Mars?"

"No."

"Have you been to Io, to Venus, to Jupiter, to Mercury? You have not. That I know. I, too, have not been. And is this right?"

NUCCHI was not sure. He sucked on his spoon thoughtfully. He wiped his rosy, big-pored nose, shrugged his big shoulders and shook his head doubtfully.

Pietro hurried on. "No, it is not right."

Nucchi nodded, now sure, since Pietro said so. Pietro had gone to high school and should know.

"Looka me," said Pietro. "Looka me, Nucchi."

Nucchi looked. He saw the gentle olive face, the full, good-humored lips and bright strong teeth. He saw tumbling oily hair.

"I looka," said Nucchi.

"Whatsa difference between me and this fella by name of Joseph Macom?"

"You meana—beeg rocket man—explorer?"

"Thatsa right. Now—looka, Nucchi, tell me, whats difference from Macom and me?"

"I dunno," said Nucchi slowly.

"I got two eyes. I got legs, ears, nose. I have more children than him. Si?"

"Si, Pietro."

"Then whats difference, tell me?"

"Pietro," said Nucchi. "It is no good to say, but you are not so smart. Is true—"

Pietro waved a calloused hand.

"No, no, *mia pabalo*, I know that. But we both work, do we not?"

"You both work, Pietro."

"And we both put great muscle in our work, *si?*"

"Si, Pietro."

"So, no matter how mucha brain he got, he no work harder than me, is true?"

"True, Pietro. You both work, you both get tired. You botha sleep. But, Pietro, he has been to college."

"Nucchi, *mia proveino*, one does not have to go to college to want to do somethin', somethin' beeg!"

"I no wanna do somethin' beeger than sleep twelve hours night," said Nucchi.

"No, no, Nucchi. Have you no dreams?"

"I dream of Marguerite—"

"About the stars, Nucchi! About the stars—"

But the time-whistle shrieked then and soon Nucchi and Pietro and Antonio and the others began the afternoon shift.

"Pietro," said Nucchi. "It is no good to dream about stars. Think only of your *bambini*. Forget Macom, he is beeg man."

"I will be beeg man, too," said Pietro. "I will sky-rocket, somaday."

"Someday," said Nucchi. "Someday, Pietro, not today."

Pietro was snug in the belly of the tractor motor making repairs and cursing his hot, endless curses of things he knew and understood but could not love.

"Someday," he said lashingly. "Someday! No, not someday, but *today!*"

A voice came from outside.

"Hey, Dionetti, are you makin' love to that engine or fixin' it? Get goin', this ship is scheduled for the Mars run in four weeks!"

PIETRO writhed internally.

"I am of twenty-seven years and of eight children and the rest of my life I must crawl into a hot engine's belly and wrestle with it! Saint Michael hold my weary head!"

He wormed his lean body out of the crane-hood and stared at the hot summer world around him. He said:

"How ina blazes does one become great

beeg man?" He spat furiously. "How ina blazes does one do it?"

The boss glared at Pietro.

"You'll get a great beeg can tied to you if you don't yank that crane into line in ten seconds!"

Pietro returned the glare.

"I donna have to stay here," he cried suddenly. "I'm-a goin' to Mr. Macom and do somathting beeg!" He flung down his monkey-wrench and stomped off.

"Hey, Dionetti, what about this crane?"

"Take the crane and—"

The Boss considered the suggestion and rejected it. . . .

"What seems to be the trouble, Mister—Mister—eh," Macom groped for the name.

Pietro supplied it. "Dionetti. Pietro Dionetti. I got eight kids and a wife and I wanna promotion."

Macom's brown eyes widened and his lips twitched in a half smile.

"Have you done anything, Mr. Dionetti, to deserve a promotion?"

"I work with my hands, I work with my heart. My head, maybe she'sa on strike, but still I worka with my body, Mr. Macom."

"Certainly. Certainly you work, Dionetti." Macom nodded solemnly, eyes twinkling. "And so do others like you. Work and work again, that's their lot. We all have to work."

Pietro threw in his trump card.

"But I am different, Mr. Macom. I am different. I see the stars."

Macom looked surprised. This man might be deeper than he seemed.

"What do you mean, Dionetti?" he asked gently. "You see the stars?"

Dionetti gazed at the ceiling as if all the planets swirled and floated there.

"At night I look like all men look, into the sky. But alla men do not see what Dionetti see. Is more than stars and moon, Mr. Macom. Is more than looking or seeing what you look at. Is feeling, Mr. Macom, *feeling*. That's what I got—feeling."

Macom leaned back in his swivel-chair.

"But that's hardly grounds for promotion, is it, Dionetti?" he asked kindly.

Pietro looked shocked. "Grounds, Mr.

Macom? Sure itsa grounds. Am I not different from others? Is not strong body different when itsa more than a body, when it try to think and feelsa more than the rest? Is it not then time for one to move?"

"Where would you move?"

"Where?" said Dionetti. A pause, then a rocketing motion of one oily hand. "Move? Up. Up!

Macom broke into understanding laughter. He rose and held out his hand. "Mr. Dionetti—"

"Yes, sir?"

"You are going up!"

"Yes, Mr. Macom?"

"Positively, Mr. Dionetti. Shake."

Pietro was warmly pleased to find that Mr. Macom esteemed him enough to grip his greasy hand. He went out grinning with anticipation.

DIONETTI took another bite out of his salami sandwich and washed it down with a mouthful of red wine. He smacked his lips and patted his stomach. "Ah, *Jesu-Guiseppe e' Maria*," he exhaled. "Thatsa good. My wife, she fix best salami sandwich since-a Mussolini."

"How can you eat, Pietro? How can you eat, when in thirty minutes, only thirty, you must leave. When in thirty minutes the rocket she eat you up and take you to Mars?"

"Nucchi, *mia proveino*, you are more nervous than me."

"What will you do on the rocket?" asked Antonio.

"What will you do on Mars?" asked Philippe.

"How long you be gone?" asked Nucchi.

Pietro finished his sandwich and stood up to wipe his hands on his pants, then suddenly realized his oily denims were gone. Instead he wore pearl-colored tights and a snug chest-doublet with a V-neck. So he wiped his hands on Nucchi's pants and Nucchi grinned to be thus honored.

"I not know how long I am gone," said Pietro. "Six months. A year. Two years. But when I come back—"

Nucchi said, "Pietro, *fren tillio*, are

you not afraid?"

Pietro began to walk across the rocket field, and the six other Italians trailed him, wagging their heads.

"Afraid?" he said. "No. I have a nervous belly, *si*. And I don't think clear, *si*. But I am not afraid."

"What sort of work will you do on the ship?" asked Antonio slyly, insinuatingly.

"Work? What do I do? Antonio, is it not enough that I go? It is not what I do now, but what I do later that will count. You wait. You see."

"You will be beeg man, Pietro?" Nucchi said.

"Yes, Nucchi. Beeg man."

"How will we know you are beeg as you say?"

"How?" Pietro paused near the edge of a hangar. In the distance he saw a slender woman with eight children in graduated lengths approaching tearfully—his wife and *bambini*.

"Just look at the sky. You will know how beeg I am. I own part of it someday, you wait and see. Dionetti own part of the sky, and ships go 'round thata place, pointing. So, that is how you know I am beeg man. That is how you know."

They all laughed together.

Tears streamed like mercury down Maria's face, and, sobbing, she clung to Pietro. He kissed her, then tenderly but firmly put off her imploring hands and patted each *bambina* and *bambino* on the head.

"You will not come back, Pietro," she wailed.

"You will see me again," he said, nodding seriously.

"Sure, sure!" the others seconded. "Pietro, he live forever. Hesa tough as asteroid flint!"

"There is the time-whistle," said Pietro. "Now I must go. I have work. Take care of the *bambini*, Maria?"

"Si."

"I go." He turned quickly, strode to the ship and popped in.

"I dun know," muttered old Nucchi, watching the preparations. "Alongaside that sheep, an' all that space—tsk—Pietro, he look like awful leetle man. Awful leetle—"

His voice was lost in thunder as the ship roared away and disappeared.

IT WASN'T a pretty job. Pietro's face got dirtier than ever before and his hands got re-calloused and his nice pearl-gray uniform had to be changed every ten hours, but he was happy as he hurtled through space. Labeled "machinist's spit-boy" he lived among revolving drums and plunging pistons, in heat and oil and sweat, and his prayers were of gratitude for the wonder of it all.

The ship sang toward the moon, the tremble and mighty power of it quivering through Pietro's every fiber. He had enough time before slipping into his bunk at the ten-hour break to glance through the double-glass port, wave his hand with vigor at Earth and shout:

"Hey, Nucchi! Hey, Antonio! Hey, Maria! Looka me!"

But still there were moments of standing at that same port, feeling infinitesimally small. Feeling like a dust-mote—one tiny little dust-mote with aspirations. It would be so hard to be a "beeg" man in the immensity of all this space.

"Well, here is Pietro Dionetti," he sighed, "in space. Now what? How does one rent an asteroid, build a casa for onesa wife and *bambini*? How does one get beeg?"

"Brr-aunch!" the radio howled.

"Stations! Men to stations!" came the command.

Stations, stations, stations, the alert went along.

"Stand by for e-mer-gen-cee!" The words were spaced, clipped, clear. "Stay-shuns! Stay-shuns!"

A wild avalanche of boots pounded stairways, ladders and hull floors. Voices blurred and mingled.

"Here, you!" A uniformed corporal-of-power hurtled past Pietro, panting, "Fall in, double!"

Pietro scrambled after, head whirling, bewildered. They pounded for the control room and took their arms-slack, feet-apart, heads-up pose beside the door with twenty others.

The rest of the personnel gunned the ship. The captain entered, began rap-

ping out commands like a teletype machine.

"MacLeod!"

"Yessir."

"Check lifeboats. Stand by, ports open, in case!"

"Yes, sir." A snapped salute, a patter of hard heels.

"Ryder!"

"Sir?"

"Provisions—check! Six days in space, in case!"

A voice cut in from the audio:

"Sir!"

"Yes?"

"Temperature's up, sir! Sector Twelve a mess! Free radium!"

"Bulkheads sealed?"

"Yes, sir. Heads 12-A, B and C!"

"Give me a twenty-second report!"

THE captain turned to his men.

"Not much for you to do. Stand by emergency boats. Wait orders. Then, when you're notified, shove off—quick! We had a cracked radium drum in Section Twelve. Radium all over the place. It's nasty.

"The atom machines are working overtime because of the double strength radium, and we're getting a chain of atom explosions started that won't stop unless that radium is dumped. And if we don't dump it in time—

"Well, at least none of us will know what happens. It'll be too quick. We can't stop the jets. We're riding full power now, using up as much as possible, giving us extra time to try and dump that free radium and stop the chain action!"

"Sweet Mary!" muttered Pietro. "If Nucchi coulda be here now!"

"Briefly," the captain hurried on, "someone's got to go in Sector Twelve in a bulger, exposed to an overdose of active radium and every other kind of ray from here to Hellas. Someone has to pick up the radium drum and chuck it out the emergency port there. Now—"

Twenty-two men raised hands together. They all volunteered, Pietro among them, even though he did not quite understand all the details. He knew there was danger, though. Yes, he

knew that.

"Hold it," said the captain. "We haven't time to waste. The man who goes in that room won't come out again. He'll be a carrier. We haven't lead-slits thick enough to fight that air. He'll be dead from the rays in a few hours. So, it's a one-way ticket, you understand."

Every hand remained up. The captain's gray eyes flicked down the line, from one to another. Good men, all of them.

Pietro stepped forward.

"Captain, sir. Whichaway to Section Twelve?"

The captain's eyes said "who's this?" The sergeant at his elbow whispered:

"Private Dionetti, sir. Machinist's helper."

Pietro said, "I donna know these other men. But they have been in school fur-ther than me. They have beeg jobs, they have done beeg jobs all their life. You needa them, all of them. But you can easy get another spit-boy, sir."

The captain stared at Dionetti for a long moment.

"You know what you have to do?"

"I have your idea, and a few of mine own."

"Why should I use you instead of the others?"

"Because I want promotion."

"Why a promotion?" the captain pressed.

"Would I deserve it if I do the job, sir?"

"You most certainly would."

"Then I will do it, Captain. It is a my job. It is my chance to do good, to be promoted." Dionetti's eyes glowed. . . .

INSIDE his bulging space suit, ready for the job, Pietro sweated and swore. He heard the captain's voice and he felt the captain's hands upon his shoulders.

"Hear me, Dionetti?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm promoting you now, in advance—Captain Dionetti!"

They shook hands.

"But—but, sir. Captain? Me a captain?"

"You may be a private in an oil-drum,

but, hang it, you're captain of our destinies!" The officer's lips were grim as he turned Pietro around, locked his suit tight in back.

"You have your orders—don't come back out. It might be best if you took this gun with you, to spare the suffering. I wish I could say 'good luck,' but—God be with you, Captain Dionetti!"

And then Pietro was alone.

Sweat streamed down his face and his hands trembled as he unsealed Sector Twelve, opened the bulk-door, slipped in, slammed it heavily shut. The impact of almost unbearable heat staggered him for a moment, held him in his tracks.

The radium drum, a small thing with a cracked top, poured out deadly emanations—rays that whipped the atom-chain explosions into a series of ever-increasing, ever-broadening violence. The chain explosions would only stop when this outside disruptive, this radium, was disposed of. And there was only one way to do that now—heave the whole thing out through an E-port.

Pietro tossed aside the gun the captain had given him. Somehow he did not want it. Quick, hot minutes of work, then he lifted the twenty-five-pound radium drum and toted it toward the E-port. He walked laboriously, because of the fire in his veins and the bulging suit. He pressed a stud with his bulbous head-glass, watched the door hiss open and close behind him as he progressed.

His mind a tortured blur, he pressed a second stud inside the air-lock, and the door leading into outer space gaped wide.

Earth swung below.

"I will fall, I will fall, to Earth," he murmured. "Sweet, kind Jesu, will Maria see me fall, will Nucchi shake his head and cry? And my *bambini*, what of them?"

"I will fall, I will fall. Is thisa the job I came after? Is this my first and my last beeg job?"

Space whirled by that open E-port, black and strange and endless.

Pietro clutched the radium tightly to his breast, took four steps out and one beeg step down. . . .

NUCCHI shook his head.

"I always say to Pietro—someday, Pietro, not today. But I am wrong. Every day is now Pietro's."

"Is that Daddy, mama? Is that Daddy?"

"*Si, bambino, si!* Yes, yes, that is your father!"

"You should be proud of him, Maria," said Nucchi.

"I am proud. Someday he say he will be big man. This I know is now true."

Nucchi shook his head sadly. "Oh, he isa so far up."

The huge telescope towered over Nucchi and his five Italian friends, and over Maria and her children. A polite lieutenant-of-astronomy stood by, explaining:

"You see, Mrs. Dionetti, when your husband stepped out of that ship with the radium, he not only saved men's lives and a ship worth millions of dollars, but unknowingly he did one other remarkable thing.

"He began an orbit of his own around the Earth. His body traveled in such a direction that the play of gravity will keep him moving forever about the world.

"He will be Earth's second satellite, a tiny companion to the moon, moving around and around and around."

"Did you hear that, *bambini*?"

The scientist went on:

The Government, in recognition of Mr. Dionetti's heroism, has designated that orbit as his grave, the moon and stars his tombstone. A fitting tribute. All ships, henceforth, will detour that orbit, so that they may not disturb his resting-place."

They all looked through the telescope again, at that tiny, quiet speck far up in space, immortal in death—Maria, her children, the others, and Nucchi.

And Nucchi shook his head and cried and loudly blew his nose. "F-funny, Ettsa funny," he said, finally, "but justa now, as I look up atta Pietro, I think I see him smile, think I hear him laugh and cry. He cry:

"Hey, *bambini!* Hey, Maria! Hey Nucchi! *Looka me!*"



The man tried to wrench himself free from Rick

*A Complete
Novelet*

PERIL ON

CHAPTER I

Race with Death

WHEN the mess gong chimed its cheerful invitation to dinner over the ship's audio, Lt. Richard Bartlett, C. T. C. of the Space Cruiser *Pollux*, rose and nodded to his assistant.

"That will be all for today, Lacey. We'll finish up tomorrow."

His aide said, "Very good, sir!", saluted, and left.

Bartlett moved slowly to the wash-basin, readying himself for the thrice-a-day ordeal that lay before him. His stomach had an appetite for the waiting meal, but his heart had none. In the three Earth months that had passed since he had qualified for the post of Chief Technical Coordinator on the *Pollux*, he had learned to dread these mess-periods. Never, at any other time

Wrecked By Space Pirates On A Moon Of Neptune,



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Bartlett's grip, reaching for his holstered Lohrman

PHOEBUS

By
NELSON S. BOND

during the long, dragging hours which are an unavoidable evil of spaceflight, did he feel so alone and friendless as when he sat at table with fellow officers.

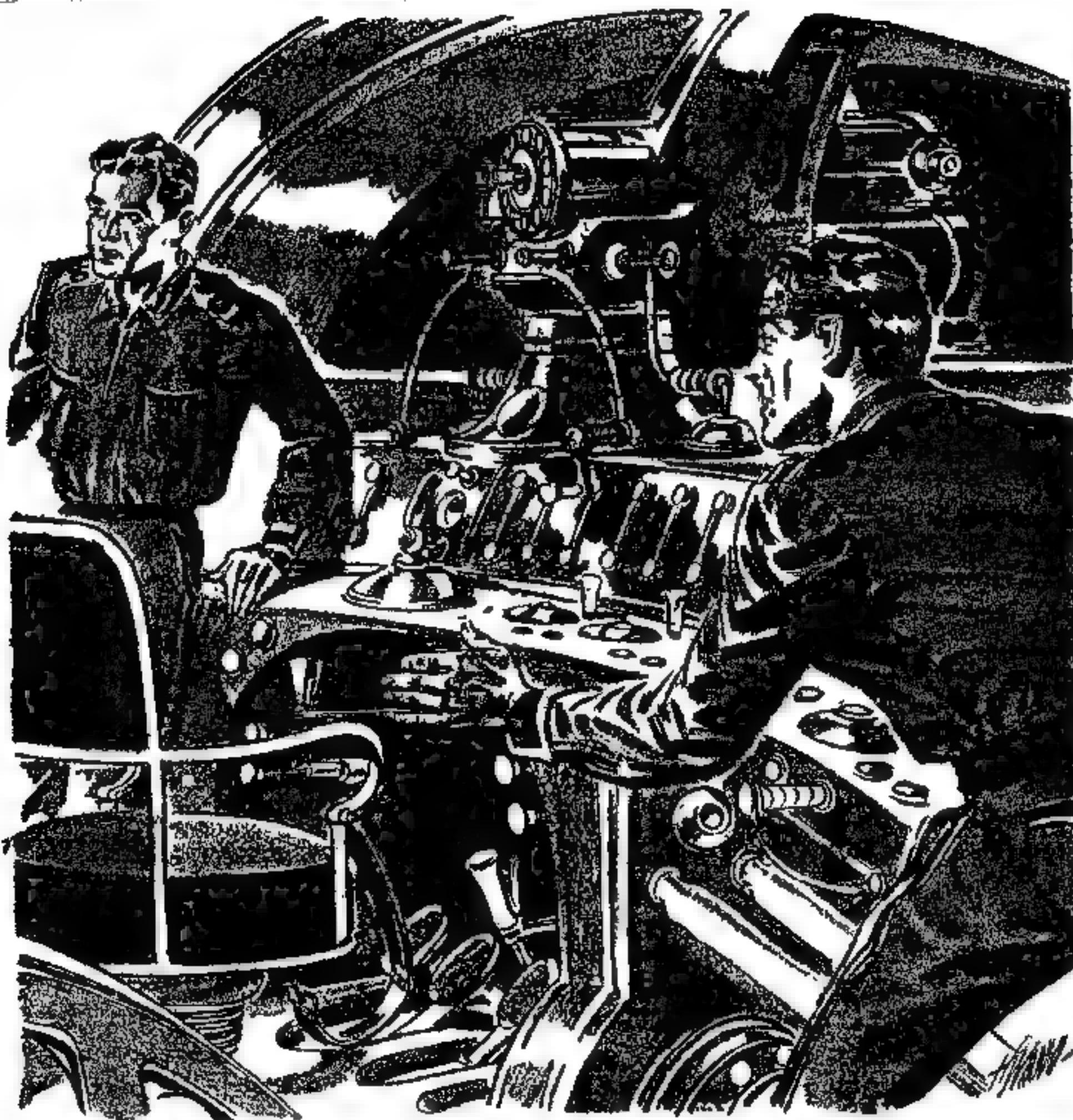
It was not that they were openly insulting, nor were they belligerent. Rick Bartlett was no physical weakling; he could have coped with either of these. But the attitude they had adopted—a mixture of deference, exaggerated politeness, covert scorn—was so subtly offensive that it left him helpless.

He would gladly give his right arm, as he moved down the ramp toward the Officers' Mess, if today, for a change, his entrance should bring one friendly grin, rather than with set and meaningless smiles. Or if just once a fellow officer should say, "The grease, Mister. Shove it down this way?"

But invariably their requests of him were elaborately correct. "Will you please pass the butter, Lieutenant Bartlett?"

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Lieutenant Rick Bartlett Battles For Survival!

This unpopularity was none of Bartlett's own doing. It was not the result of anything he had ever done. It was due to the fame of his illustrious brother.

WHEN he had first met the junior officers of the *Pollux*, they had at first been jovial.

"So you're the new Brains, eh? Nice work if you can get it."

"Bartlett?" some muttered audibly. "Did he say Bartlett? Is he related to Russell Bartlett?"

And that, of course, tore everything to shreds. For he was, indeed the younger brother of Space Commander Russell Bartlett, hero of East Fontanaland and New Thermopylae, D. S. R. and Knight of the Imperial Ionian Scarlet. Thereupon descended an invisible wall of suspicion, which effectively sealed him off from all hope of future friendship.

Everyone felt about it as did Ned Murchison, First Mate of the *Pollux*.

"Favoritism!" he grumbled. "That's what it is, rank favoritism. I've been in the Service seven years, and I'm no nearer a C. T. C.'s grid than I was when I first hoisted gravs. But here he comes, fresh out of the Academy, still wet behind the ears, and plumps himself into the softest berth afloat. The kid's just riding to glory on his brother's rep. Technical coordinator, bah! Let's leave him alone."

Which they did, and severely.

Even the Skipper always addressed Bartlett as "Lieutenant," and never as "Rick" at the mess table. Yet the Old Man frequently called his other juniors by their Christian names, and when he spoke to his Chief Engineer, O'Rourke, his terminology sometimes bordered on the blasphemous.

This particular meal was no exception to the hundred-odd others that had preceded it. Bartlett made no effort to enter into the conversation. He glanced up from his plate only once, when an orderly, coming from the turret to Captain Warren's side, whispered something which brought Warren to his feet

with a muttered apology.

"Excuse me, gentlemen."

He left the room. Dover stared after him curiously.

"Now what? We off trajectory?"

Halloway shook his head. "We were oh-oh when I gave the bucket to Ned. The hypos must be acting up again."

Chief O'Rourke glared up from beneath red and shaggy thatches of brow.

"'Tis a lie!" he roared. "There's nothin' wrong with my motors, you impudent young blatherskite."

Dover reverted to the use of the primitive senses on which, even in a highly mechanized age, spacemen were oftentimes dependent. He sniffed and listened. "Air's good," he said. "And the hypos do sound O. Q. I wonder what's up?"

Bartlett, too, was wondering. At his last General Check everything had been all right. The *Pollux* was thirteen weeks out of Io City on the Jupiter-Neptune run, nearing the single-satellited planet. Hypos, grav gear, air and water were O. Q. Trajectory and declension on the nose, acceleration right for far space travel. There was only one other possible thing: a message important enough to draw the Skipper from his dinner.

His guess was verified immediately. Into the telaudio plate on the messhall's wall came a bluish glow. The Old Man looked down upon them. His eyes were anxious.

"Lieutenant Bartlett —" he said. "Dover—Halloway—"

Instantly all three were on their feet.

"Yes, sir?"

"Come to the bridge immediately. We are assigned to special duty. There has been an accident." Warren's eyes now evaded Rick Bartlett's stare.

"The *Iris* has crashed upon Davy Jones."

BARTLETT gasped as if he had been struck a physical blow. The *Iris*! The flagship of the Outer Fleet, commanded by Russ! He did not realize his face was white as, bursting first from the dining hall, he paced his fellow officers to the turret.

On the bridge were the Skipper,

Murchison, and Danny Muldoon, the ship Sparks. The message Sparks had received from New Oslo was ominous in its brevity:

SC POLLUX PROCEEDED INSTANTLY RELIEF IRIS DOWN PHOEBUS STOP SENDING ADDITIONAL AID IMMEDIATELY STOP.

"An' that's all I could get out of them," complained the radioman. "I bugged 'em for more information but didn't get an answer."

Ned Murchison frowned. "Probably," was his comment, "because that's all the information they have themselves. If they find out anything more, they'll undoubtedly pass it on." Ned Murchison already was strapped in the bucket-shaped pilot's seat, setting studs. "Course revision ready for check, sir."

"Good. Check course revision, Lieutenant Bartlett."

Bartlett rapidly checked the placements. "All O.Q., sir!" he approved.

"Increased acceleration," ordered Warren.

"Increased acceleration," repeated Bartlett.

He whistled down the tube to O'Rourke in the engine room. "Raise hypos to thirty-forty Ack, and open all jets!"

It did not occur to him, nor did it register upon anyone else in the turret, that for the first time since this flight began Rick Bartlett had been called upon to assume the difficult role of emergency Technical Coordinator, and he had stepped quietly and capably into the breech. Bartlett had more important things to worry about. He fingered the pages of the Solar Constant chart, made a few swift mental calculations.

"Seven hours, sir," he said. "Maybe six. Time enough to prepare a landing party."

Halloway, the Third, looked confused.

"B-but you said Davy Jones, sir," he said to the Old Man. "The radiogram says the *Iris* crashed on Phoebus!"

Captain Warren turned to Bartlett. "What is known about Phoebus, Lieutenant?"

Bartlett closed his eyes, marshaled his thoughts. This was the major responsibility of his post, the reason men were specially trained to the office of C.T.C. So that in case of emergency there should be aboard each ship one man whose mind was a reservoir of technical knowledge. Mathematical, astronomical, biological facts that might prove of value in whatever situation arose. Memory flooded back to him.

"The only satellite of Neptune," he said. "Observed first almost three hundred years ago, in Eighteen-forty-seven, by Lassell, it was not named until Nineteen-eighty-three, at which time it was called Phoebus. Spacemen, finding this confusing with Phobos, Mars' inner moon, and Phoebe, ninth satellite of Saturn, nick-named it 'Davy Jones' in honor of the traditional companion of Neptune.

"Its distance from the mother planet is approximately the same as the moon's distance from Earth, two twenty thousand miles. Its period of rotation is five days, twenty-one hours. Phoebus revolves from east to west in a nearly circular orbit, inclined twenty degrees to Neptune's equator. Its rotation period is fifteen-point-eight hours and the direction of rotation east to west.

"Phoebus has a diameter of forty-two hundred miles, as reported by an Astrographic Research Expedition in Twenty-one-oh-nine, and is, therefore, approximately the same size as the planet Mars. However, no effort has been made to colonize it because—"

HERE Rick Bartlett stopped, stricken suddenly with a realization of what his calm recital would mean to the Earthmen now down on the bleak satellite. Cap Warren coughed gruffly.

"Go on, Lieutenant," he said.

"Phoebus cannot be colonized by man because of the insurmountable difficulties of there establishing habitations suitable to Earth-humans," continued Bartlett. "Outwardly frigid, coated like its mother planet with a thick sheathing of ice, due to its great distance from the Sun, this satellite is still subject to vio-

lent volcanic disturbances, occasioned by the perturbations created by the erratic orbit of Pluto.

"No life, either animal or vegetable, has been found on Davy Jones. Without unusually adequate protection, human life could not be supported thereon for longer than—"

When he faltered this time, Captain Warren did not press him to continue. He knew, as did the others who had listened to these facts, how short a time the survivors of the *Iris*—if any—could last. Only while they had food, air and water. Which meant, if their ship was damaged—just so long as their emergency spacesuits held out. Twenty-four hours at the most!

Captain Warren turned to the speaking tube, and his voice was an edged blade.

"Chief O'Rourke, shift hypos to maximum velocity."

"Aye, sir."

The thrumming drone of motors gathered tempo and the *Pollux*, every jet spewing a scarlet flame in its wake, seemed to pick itself up and hurtle bodily forward as if thrust from the maw of a gigantic catapult....

CHAPTER II

Lair of Evil Men

IF WHAT transpired, of what he did and said in those next action-fraught hours, Rick Bartlett was never afterwards certain. It was as if he were two men, two entities. One of these was young Ricky Bartlett, kid brother of Russ Bartlett, racked with fear and apprehension for the safety of one whom he loved with a fierce devotion. The other was Lieutenant Bartlett, Chief Technical Coordinator of the Space Cruiser *Pollux*—who coldly foresaw ordered, those things which must be done to save a Space Commander.

Dover he sent to the crew's quarters.

"Ask for volunteers. Select a dozen. Equip each of them with a bulger, per-

malloy semi-rigid model, and check the heating units. Oh, yes—see that each bulger is supplied with emergency rations, water, spare oxytank and cough drops."

"Er—cough drops?" said Dover in surprise. "Aye, sir!"

Dover left, on the jump, but even in this vigorous moment Bartlett felt the twisting hurt of that stifled query.

Had understanding been established between them, Second would have finished the question. As it was, Cap Warren asked it after Dover had gone below.

"Why cough drops, Lieutenant?"

"Methane irritants in Davy Jones' atmosphere," explained Bartlett. "Theoretically the spacesuits are leak-proof, but at extreme temperatures, being the semi-rigid type, they sometimes permit seepage at the junctures. The landing party may find need for something to relieve throat irritation."

He turned to the waiting Third. "Lieutenant Halloway."

"Yes, sir?"

"Ready sick-bay to take care of possible casualties. And advise Sparks to raise New Oslo and order radio silence. We may want to reach them in a hurry. Captain Warren, have I your permission to lead the landing party?"

"It's irregular, Lieutenant."

"I know, sir. But—"

Bartlett was on the verge of saying that his brother was the man for whom they sought. But he never finished. For at that moment Ned Murchison called from the control board.

"Davy Jones on the nose, sir. Check deceleration?"

Bartlett moved to the board to check. But at that moment disaster struck!

Even as through the *perilens* he glimpsed the gigantic snowball-in-space which was Davy Jones—its shimmering, blue-white surface whirled, bobbed, spun dizzily. There came a staggering shock, a feeling of oppressive weight struck him to his knees, he heard Cap Warren's roar of dismay through ears that pounded with a sudden surge of blood—and the *Pollux* smashed Phoe-

buswards with the wilful, unchecked violence of a meteoride.

The combined drag of a dozen gravs and unfathomable acceleration gripped him to the floor, but somehow he managed to lift his head. What he now saw mirrored in the *perilens* as Davy Jones loomed larger, larger and nearer, brought a cry to his bleeding lips.

"Captain!"

"Vector warp!" shouted the Old Man. "Grav drag must be greater than the reports said. Snared us—"

"It's not that at all!" cried Bartlett. "It's an enemy. Men down there. They're deliberately crashing us on a hypertensile beam. Murchison, jam on the Dixie rod—fast!"

Bartlett's words were wasted breath. The initial shock had jerked Murchison's head forward and down across the control, his face was buried in a tangle of untouched studs. From his left temple, where it lay plastered by ever-increasing acceleration to a thick, brass guide-bar, oozed a ribbon of red.

MURCHISON was out cold. Captain Warren was helpless—an aging man, pinned by imponderable weight to the flooring as if he were a mounted insect. It was up to Rick Bartlett. He alone could save the *Pollux* from sudden, complete disaster. Laboriously, each movement wrenching a groan of protest from his straining lips, he dragged himself across the floor to the controls. A yard. Another yard. A third—

His ears seemed nigh to bursting with the torrent of sound that assailed them. The high, thin scream of the *Pollux* as it hurtled from thin space into the weak upper reaches of the satellite's atmosphere—the hoarse, demanding cries from the audio as tortured crewmen in various parts of the vessel shouted queries to the bridge—from somewhere in the ship a scream of pain—from within himself the agonized labor of lungs strained almost beyond endurance.

And then—somehow—his hand was on the base of the Dixie bar. The deceleration bar. The bar which, if he

could summon the strength to reach up and draw it toward him, would throw a block against the tensile beam that was dragging them to destruction.

He drew a long and shuddering breath into his lungs. Across the room Captain Warren's stertorous breathing bespoke an intensity equal to his own. He poised himself for the all-important effort . . . gathered weight-laden muscles . . . and rose!

Only for an instant—but that instant was enough! For even as his staggering knees collapsed beneath him, Rick Bartlett threw himself forward, clenched both arms about the rod—and fell. And the actual force which had been their doom now became their salvation. The rod clanged into position. The *Pollux* trembled, quivered, as though pounded in the forejets with a gigantic maul. Bartlett thought he could hear its struts and girders groaning with the torsion of that halt.

And then, so suddenly that quick nausea rose, choked him, where weight had gripped him like an iron claw, changed into the precious peace of normality. Bleak Davy Jones, on the icy plateaux of which someone had mounted the weapon which had so nearly drawn the *Pollux* to destruction, continued to grow in the visiplate. Men, angrily gesticulating, poured from hidden dwellings to watch the ship settle easily to ground. Men in bulgers, armed men, grim of visage, surged forward to board the landing vessel.

But Rick Bartlett saw none of this. With face frozen in a grimace of mingled pain and triumph, he lay senseless on the metal deck of the *Pollux*.

From far distances of space came an eerie murmuring. The swift syllablation of a voice speaking meaningless words. Then nearer came the sound—nearer still and louder—clearer, more comprehensible.

Rick Bartlett opened his eyes, conscious at last and aware that the *Pollux* had grounded, to find himself still in the control turret of the cruiser, surrounded by strangers.

It was one of these who was bent over

him, shaking him to consciousness. Still others crowded the doorways. Across the room a man was prodding battered, bewildered Captain Warren with staccato questions.

"Come on, now, speak up, Captain," he shouted. "How did you know we were here? Who told you? Did you come alone? Who landed this ship?"

His queries were forcefully impatient. The Old Man, Rick saw, had—like himself—drawn a blank when the cruiser had crash-landed.

EVEN now Warren's mind was not clear. Nor did it aid his foggy thought-processes to have queries thrust at him in this rapid fashion, punctuated by shakes and backhand swipes across the face.

"Answer, blast you," snarled the stranger. And again he raised his hand.

Bartlett came to his feet in a bound. In three strides he had crossed the room, grasped the questioner's lifted arm and spun him around.

"Hold it, *theekol*," he gritted. "That's no way to get answers. Can't you see the Captain, warped? Lay off."

He had not taken time to choose his words, and the man whose wrist he held, turned purple. *Theekol* was a Martian word not commonly employed in polite drawing-room conversation. Its nearest English equivalent was "space rat."

Bartlett had succeeded in drawing this antagonist's attention to himself. The man tried to wrench himself free from Rick Bartlett's grip, reaching for the Lohrman holstered in his belt. As quickly Bartlett stabbed for his own weapon and found nothing! He had been stripped of his sidearms.

Perhaps the surprised expression on his face saved him, or perhaps in that brief instant the other man realized that he, after all, was the master of the situation. At any rate, his rage changed to a smile of derision and his gun-hand stayed its motion.

"Spoke a little hastily, didn't you, Lieutenant?" he sneered.

This time it was Bartlett who glared about him wildly, for the first time not-

ing that each of the group bore arms.

"What is this?" he asked. "Who are you, and by what right do you board a Space Patrol vessel?"

The other man smiled. It was not a pleasant smile.

"I'm afraid you still do not understand the situation, Lieutenant," he said. "I'm asking the questions around here, not you. However, I have no objection to telling you my name. I am John Fallon."

"Black Jack Fallon!"

Bartlett knew the name. Every staff and crewman in the Solar Space Patrol had seen the posters, issued by the Planetary Federation, offering rewards for the apprehension of this space pirate, dead or alive.

There had been a time—and not too long ago—when the void had been infested with scores of corsairs such as Fallon. Pirates, privateers, outlaws—once space had swarmed with their vessels. But that had been before the S.S.P., freed at last from martial duty by the Interplanetary Peace Pact of 2133, had been able to turn its full, undivided attention to this problem.

Within the last decade practically all the pirating gangs had been hunted down and sent to the Penal Colonies on the outer planets.

But one pirate—the most vicious of them all—had so far escaped the far-flung seine of the Patrol. That man was Black Jack Fallon, before whom Bartlett now stood, face-to-face.

"That is what they call me, Lieutenant. And now, a fair return for my answer. What brought you here to Davy Jones?"

"What? Why, a—" Bartlett was on the verge of giving an honest answer. And then, suddenly, he understood. Black Jack's anxiety was easy to understand.

THIS almost forgotten satellite—this tiny moon of Neptune spurned by land-granters and corporations alike—was Fallon's long-sought hideout.

"—a routine trip," finished Bartlett deftly. "Our patrol is the Uranus-Nep-

tune shuttle. There is nothing unusual in our visit."

"Then there are no ships following you?"

"No."

Fallon studied him shrewdly for a second. Then—

"You're lying, Lieutenant," he asserted flatly. "You know we shot down the *Iris* some hours ago. We happen to know the *Iris* sent an S.O.S. You picked it up and followed, isn't that right?"

His tone was stridently assured. But Rick Bartlett, who had been trained to watch the hands, rather than the eyes of suspect men, noted suddenly that Fallon's fingers stirred restlessly, querulously, on the zippered lining of his belt. And in that moment he knew that Fallon was bluffing!

Fallon did not know for sure that the *Iris* had sent an S.O.S. But—why not?

Rick's brain, desperately seeking a reason for the pirate's uncertainty, found the answer in his memory. Something he had heard once, read once. A fact included in the Astrographic Society's report on the satellite Phoebus:

A physical peculiarity of Neptune's satellite is the fact its Heaviside layer is highly static. This renders impossible radio intercourse outside the atmospheric confines of the sphere. Thus radio messages cannot be sent from or to stations on Phoebus . . .

He shook his head.

"No. We heard no message. The—the *Iris*, you say? You mean the flagship of the Fleet?"

There was mockery in Black Jack Fallon's reply.

"The flagship, sailor. Even it was not proof against our new hypertensile beam. That's the seventh ship we've brought down in the last two months. Yours is the eighth—" His eyes glinted. "And that reminds me—somehow you managed to operate the Dixie in time to keep from crashing. Who did that? Who landed this ship?"

"I did."

"So? Not bad, sailor. I could use a man like you. What's your name?"

Rick Bartlett did not answer that

question. It was answered for him unexpectedly, dramatically. From the outer corridor came a confusion of sounds: scuffling, the pounding of footsteps, voices harsh with anger. The door burst open. Three men, bulger-clad but with their helms thrown back, stood on the threshold. Two of these propelled a central one forward to the outlaw leader.

"Tried to escape, Chief," roared one of the pirates in explanation. "Broke out of the cave and sneaked on board this ship. We caught him."

At that moment the captive's gaze, lifting defiantly, settled upon Bartlett. Both men started. And before the lieutenant was able to warn his brother by word or sign, Space Commander Russell Bartlett spoke. "Rick! What are you doing here, kid?"

CHAPTER III

Death by Degrees

IT TOOK no camera eye to mark the likeness existing between the two men thus suddenly confronted. Family relationship was plainly delineated in their features, their identical builds, the way they stared at each other. And Black Jack Fallon was no fool.

He glanced from Russ Bartlett to Rick, then laughed curtly.

"Brothers, eh?"

"I'm O.Q., Russ," said Rick Bartlett swiftly. And to Fallon he said, "Yes, but I had no idea—"

"Never mind, Lieutenant. I think I understand now." You did come here seeking the *Iris*! But—" And again Black Jack Fallon chuckled grimly. "But you didn't see the ship."

Rick Bartlett scowled. That was right. Apparently the *Iris* had met its fate on or near this spot, but it was not now in sight. How could that be?

Fallon was all action now.

"I shall talk with you again, Lieutenant," he said significantly. "Meanwhile, there is work to be done. Your arrival

no doubt will bring other vessels of the Patrol nosing around here. Mills! Le-Grandant! Take our new guests to their quarters. And tell the men to hide this ship before more visitors arrive."

Then, as the designated guards prodded Bartlett and Captain Warren into bulgers, herded all three prisoners out of the turret, down the ramps and through the airlock to the snow-crusted terrain of Davy Jones, Black Jack hurried away.

Rick Bartlett learned with gladness that none of the *Pollux*' command or crew had been seriously injured in the landing of the ship. As they gained the outside, they were joined by a score of other bulger-clad figures.

Recognizable behind the quartzite face-ports of these were the features of Dover and Hallowy, O'Rourke and Lacey, Sparks, Slops—all the members of the Patrol. Only two forms had to be carried: that of Ned Murchison, still unconscious from the blow he had sustained on the temple, and that of one of the blasters, a chap named Wilkerson.

"Leg, Captain Warren," O'Rourke explained briefly. "Broken."

They were led across a quarter mile of flat, unbroken white toward what appeared to be nothing more than a series of roundtopped, irregular hummocks. But as they approached these, Rick understood where and what Black Jack's "hideout" was—and why it was so successful. For at the base of one of these tiny hills he saw a small black opening. A door.

This, then, made everything clear. Fallon had moved to the surface of Davy Jones a number of Domes, similar to those used by Earth prospectors on all the inhospitable dots that circle Earth's Sun, and had in them established a headquarters that, once covered with a layer of snow, would evade the search of punitive parties.

As Bartlett comprehended this, he deduced something else—how the *Iris* had been and the *Pollux* would be, concealed. Looking back, he saw that his guess was correct. Even now, Fallon's followers were engaged in the operation that

would make the *Pollux* invisible to those who came seeking her. They were busily hosing a fine spray of something—what? Bartlett wondered briefly. Carbon dioxide?—over the ship. The spray congealed even before it fell upon the glistening metal structure of the ship. Half of it still glinted silver in the reflected light of Neptune on the horizon, the other half was a mound, a rounded hillock, like those toward which they were now being led.

Russ Bartlett whose gaze had followed that of his brother, swore.

"No wonder we've never been able to find Fallon," he said. "Perfect camouflage. He and his gang can rule this roost indefinitely without being detected."

"A flare," Rick Bartlett said tentatively. "If we made a flame which was bright enough someone might rescue us."

RUSS BARTLETT'S bulger rippled minutely, indicated that within its depths he must have shrugged.

"With what?"

Then both men relapsed into silence as their guards, glaring at them suspiciously, motioned them into the cubicle that served as the prisoners' pen.

Prison it definitely was.

It was there, some few minutes later, that Lieutenant Rick Bartlett realized fully the helplessness of their plight.

There were a dozen men already in the small, underground metal Dome. The *Pollux* captives swelled the number to almost three-score, and these were scant quarters for so many men. But no one lamented the confined quarters. They mourned, instead, the loss of their comrades who would have cramped the space even more.

"We were not so fortunate as you were," said Commander Bartlett. "We were too near the surface when we fell. The *Iris* is a total wreck. We lost nine men."

"Those men will be avenged, Commander!" said Captain Warren. "Fallon can't get away with this. He's gone too

far this time. We came seeking you because of a message from New Oslo."

Russ nodded. "Our Sparks got a crash SOS out before we realized what we were up against."

"And that same message said that other assistance was following immediately. There'll be a half dozen vessels of the Fleet hovering over here within twenty-four hours."

Something had been vaguely troubling Rick Bartlett. Now he asked, "But why, Russ—I mean, Commander—why does Fallon risk discovery by shooting down two ships of the Fleet?" he inquired.

"Power mad!" explained his brother succinctly. "He has a perfect hideout and a powerful weapon. The hypotensile beam. Were he satisfied to do so, the pirate colony he has established could perch here from now to eternity, sniping off such occasional merchantmen. But he wants more than that. He is ambitious to command a fleet of marauding ships."

Frank Dover interposed. "But how about us, sir? We represent a problem. He can't maintain us here as prisoners forever. What does he plan to do?"

Commander Russell Bartlett's face was grim.

"How much food and water have you brought into this dungeon with you?" he asked Rick Bartlett.

"Only the emergency rations in our bulgers."

"Exactly. We are all in the same fix. By pooling our reserves of food and water, we have perhaps enough to sustain life for perhaps three days. After that will come slow starvation and death by thirst."

"So that was it!"

Rick Bartlett stared at his brother incredulously. It was not conceivable that in this day and age there should be a situation so cruelly savage as this, or a man so needlessly cruel. Then he studied again, and with a more critical eye, his surroundings. The future looked gloomy indeed. A hemispherical Dome of permalloy, artificially

heated and air-controlled but otherwise not at all equipped for the sustenance of life. No bunks, no stove, no equipment. Only, at the farther circle of the wall from where they were now gathered, a narrow viaduct spilling smoky liquid into a trough which, slicing across a short arc, disgorged its stream through a similar circular vent.

"Starvation, maybe, but not thirst," Rick Bartlett said. "At least we have water." He moved toward the tiny stream. Russ Bartlett's voice lifted in swift warning.

"Don't touch that."

Lieutenant Bartlett jerked his hand back. He had been saved in the nick of time for in his nostrils tingled the raw, familiar odor of a fluid he had oftentimes used in laboratory experiments.

HE GASPED. Then his blood ran cold at the narrowness of his escape.

"Sulphuric?"

"Right," his brother nodded grimly. "Vitriol. Don't ask me why that stream runs through there. I don't know. It was probably first intended for sanitation. Knowing Fallon, my guess would be that it is another evidence of his blood thirst. Nothing would delight him more than to learn that one of his 'guests' had ignorantly tried to drink from the rivulet. Jenkins started to—"

Bartlett nodded toward one of his spacemen, who presented mute proof in the form of a bandaged hand.

Rick Bartlett gazed thoughtfully at the fumed trickle of acid.

"I think I understand. Davy Jones is volcanic underneath its sheathing of ice and this natural sulphuric flows up underneath the section on which Fallon's Domes are built. It would be used for sanitation." Then a sudden thought struck him; his eyes narrowed.

"Where does this stream go when it leaves this Dome?"

His brother shrugged. "I don't know, Rick."

One of the spaceman, second class, spoke up.

"If the Commander will excuse me, sir—" He coughed nervously. "I happened to notice, while we was topside, seen it quite plain, sir, I did, that there stream empties into a pool. Sort of lake, sir, back of the Domes."

A half-formed thought occurred to Rick Bartlett.

"An exposed pool, spaceman?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

Captain Warren snorted.

"The man must be mistaken, Lieutenant. Davy Jones is a frigid planet. Even sulphuric acid freezes."

"But don't forget," interrupted Rick Bartlett excitedly, "this pool is being constantly replenished by hot acid from below. I think he's right, Captain! And if he is we can consider ourselves lucky."

He looked at his brother. "How long have we been in here?"

"Perhaps two hours."

"Then the relief ships should arrive in twenty more. We won't be able to see them, but we'll be able to hear their hypos, won't we?"

Russ Bartlett nodded.

"Yes. I heard yours. That's when I attempted to escape. But you won't be able to do what I did. They are more cautious now."

"We're not going to set foot outside this Dome," said Rick Bartlett excitedly. "As a matter of fact, we may find it necessary to defend ourselves in this room. But we are going to get a message to our friends when they arrive. Our hideout is camouflaged. Without some assistance our friends might search for us in vain. But there is one thing that will surely attract their attention, bring them unerringly to this spot.

"And that one thing will be what?"

"A sign of human life," said Rick Bartlett. "A flame blossoming in the icy waste where there is nothing to burn. Fallon will be helpless either to prevent or extinguish our signal. He will be powerless against more than one relief ship. His weapon is effective against only one at a time."

Halloway turned to Captain Warren bitterly.

"He's off his grays, Captain. I've been thinking it over, and there's only one thing to do. Start a rumpus, make a break from this place, and go down fighting."

There was scorn in his voice; scorn and a veiled collection of the attitude which had always been a barrier between Rick Bartlett and his shipmates. A few days ago, Rick Bartlett would have withered before that reproof. But not now.

THIS was the final straw. He whirled on Halloway viciously.

"Lieutenant Halloway!" Rick Bartlett's voice crackled. "Let me hear no more insolence from you." He turned to the others with flashing eyes. "Captain Warren and Commander Bartlett: I realize you both outrank me, but in times of danger, under unusual and extraordinary circumstances, when the value of special technical skill becomes of paramount importance, a Technical Officer may assume command. That time is now. All of you here know the special clause in the Planetary Patrol Code to which I refer.

"Under the power thus invested in me, I now issue the following orders:

"Commander Bartlett, you and the men of the *Iris* will organize as a rear-guard detail to hold the door of this Dome in the event that the enemy should attempt to force entrance.

"Captain Warren, select five helpers. You will find that in each of the thirty-odd spacesuits there is a pocket gelatin-lined for the storage of flare cartridges. Tear each of these from its bulger and let me have it.

"Lieutenant Murchison!"

Ned Murchison was sitting up now. His head was bandaged, and he still looked a little groggy, but there was a smile on his lips. Perhaps he was remembering that it was Rick Bartlett who, when the chips were down, had taken control of the *Pollux* bridge. Perhaps he was remembering that it was the despised "Brains" who had managed to

jam on the Dixie when things looked blackest for the doomed ship. Or perhaps he just liked this new, fiery Rick Bartlett.

"Aye, sir," he said. "Orders acknowledged and understood, sir!"

That answer brought back the smile to Rick Bartlett's white lips.

"Thanks, Lieutenant," he said. "Listen, then! I want all the sugar supplies from the provision bags. Even the chocolate. Pack this in some of the sacks Captain Warren will give you. And in the remainder of the sacks you will place, pulverized, all the cough drops."

It seemed, thought Rick Bartlett oddly, he could not say that word without making someone gasp. This time it was his brother.

"Cough drops, Rick?"

Rick Bartlett made no reply. He was engrossed with pleasure in the overheard comment of Frank Dover who, like Murchison, had finally decided to play on his side. Dover was prodding the spacemen to action.

"O.Q., boys," he was saying. "Let's go! The Brains says we have a job of work to do, and time's awasting."

CHAPTER IV

Pool of Fire

LONG hours of monotonous drudgery followed. The prisoners were working entirely without tools; it was a laborious task to extract the delicate gelatinized membranes from the bulgers without rupturing them, an even more delicate task to fill them with those items Rick Bartlett had designated and secure them in taped bundles.

His brother doubted the likelihood of even a flame being spotted by the watchers above.

"Too small, Rick. This satellite is a blinding sheen of white light. You know that."

"But it won't be in another hour or so," Rick Bartlett told him. "By the time relief comes, it will be pitch black."

And thus it was, as the twentieth hour approached, a haggard Rick Bartlett looked happily upon the completion of his plan. The sacks of sugar and ground cough drops lay taped together as he had ordered. There remained but the last act, the finale for which the drone of hypatomic motors overhead should be the cue.

It was at this moment that he was summoned to appear before the outlaw leader.

Black Jack Fallon was in an amiable mood. He had a proposition to offer. He made it bluntly.

"I'll get down to cases without mincing words, Lieutenant. I've taken a fancy to you. I like any man of courage. If you'll throw in with me, I'll make it well worth any supposed 'honors' you lose in doing so. You'll be rich, Lieutenant. And you'll have power—greater power than anyone else in the universe. Except, of course, myself. Well?"

Rick Bartlett simulated hesitation. There was a chance, even yet, that freedom might be obtained by a ruse, and that his wildly spectacular "plan," with its possibility of failure, need not be thrown into operation.

"What about my brother?" Rick Bartlett asked.

Fallon frowned, then laughed.

"I'll set him loose in a skiff and let him take his own chances."

A life-skiff, as Rick Bartlett knew only too well, would not have a chance of ever gaining a sanctuary from the far reaches of Neptune. Concealing his rage, Rick Bartlett stalled for time.

"Let me think it over," he said. "Maybe I will join."

Fallon scowled and was about to make some fiery answer when a guard burst into the outlaw's headquarters.

"Chief! Patrol ships approaching in the eighty-third quad!"

"How many?"

"At least four. Maybe more."

Whatever Black Jack's faults, he was a leader of men. Instantly his personal grievance was submerged by this threat. He jabbed a finger at the men who had

brought Bartlett hither.

"Take him back. I'll see him after the Patrol's gone. Hughes, general black-out order. Kill all motors. We can't handle four enemy ships at once. Total silence, and they'll never find us."

As his guards led Rick Bartlett back across the snowy plain to the prison, Rick Bartlett saw in the jet velvet of far space night the coruscating streamers which were the wakes of their rescuers. And he noted especially, with a breathtaking rebirth of hope, that the sailor had been right. Beyond the prison Dome lay a hazy, bubbling pool, like a gaping maw against the white mantle of Davy Jones . . .

Plot and counterplot!

It was, Rick Bartlett knew, all or nothing now. He turned to his brother.

"I'll need help, Russ. Quick, men! Be ready to carry out the plan as I mapped it out."

OUTSIDE the Dome all was silent, all was dark. Then came a thin, far stir of sound. Like a lazy bumbling of a sweat-bee drowsily seeking pollen in the quiet heat of midsummer. Louder it grew as the ships drew nearer. It rose from a drone to a rumble, from a rumble to a muted rolling of tympani. Commander Bartlett glanced at his brother. "Now?" his eyes questioned.

"Wait!" breathed Rick Bartlett. They must be directly above, or as nearly so as the kind fates would guide them. There was but material for one brief signal. If it were not seen the situation would be desperate. The pirates would kill them all.

The thunder deepened. In the skies above, rockets flamed and mighty engines throbbed. The explosions were deafening, near and constant. Rick Bartlett's voice rose in a loud command.

"Now!"

And he hurled two of the gelatinized sacks into the stream that traversed the Dome. Two, then two more. Russ Bartlett still did not know what his brother was doing, but he, too, began alternately lifting and hurling. The flimsy bags hit and splashed, murky acid splattering

dangerously close to the two men as they labored. The stream swirled angrily, tugged at the bags as if resentful, then swept them away, out of the Dome, into the pool beyond.

Again and again. Lift and toss. The last packages disappeared.

It was done! The sacks had vanished into the outer darkness. Rick Bartlett was conscious that he was cold with sweat, that his knees, now and unaccountably, were weak beneath him.

A cry rose from someone in the chamber.

"But nothing happened. What went wrong?"

"Wait," pleaded Rick. "Wait. It will work. It has to work!"

He was listening for the one sound that would spell an end to his doubts, the sound of rocket-motors cutting off. This would mean a rescue ship was gliding to ground.

And it came. Where the keen, space-trained ear had been able to determine the roar of four separate motors, suddenly there were but three. Then two. Then a single one—and it circling over and overhead, standing guard as its companion ships made landings.

There was no longer silence in the pirate camp. Loud cries arose, followed by the thud of their ordnance going into action. The heavier, sharper, more decisive slash of Patrol guns seeking an enemy, came next.

And as Rick Bartlett had foreseen, there was need for defense of their own prison. For footsteps approached their Dome, a key ground at the lock. But Russ Bartlett had not won honors at Fontanaland and the siege of New Thermopylae without reason. Even without arms, a defense of sorts had been arranged. Piled high against the portal were the three-score metal space-suits. They formed a bulwark beyond which the would-be invaders could not pass. The foremost, shearing a way through by main force, stumbled and lost his gun, arming one of the besieged. Another fell, his skull smashed like an eggshell by a lead-weighted bulger boot wielded by brawny Chief O'Rourke.

It was a losing battle the little garrison fought, but for the time element. That was what saved them. Because as the front rank wavered before the increasing ray-fire from outside, there came a withering blast into the rear of the attack party. The Patrolmen had landed and trapped the outlaws in a raking cross-fire. After that, it was all over . . .

THE clean-up operations were messy but brief. Black Jack Fallon knew only too well that he could expect no clemency from the Planetary Court which would sit in judgment on him. He presented his defense here on frigid Davy Jones. His steel-jacketed arguments cost the lives of seven spacemen.

But the Dome in which Fallon made his last stand was no match for the armament of the Patrol. In the end, it went up in a spume of flame, sharded metal and ice, and its destruction marked an end to the outlawry of Black Jack Fallon.

There remained the task of unearthing the ice-bound ships which had fallen prey to Fallon's tensor weapon. The *Pollux*, freed of its layer of camouflage, proved to be spaceworthy, as did two of the other vessels taken captive by the pirates. The *Iris* had to be abandoned. When this was known, the Captain of one of the ships came to Commander Russ Bartlett.

"I'm afraid the *Iris* is a total loss, sir. Except for the arms, which are being transferred to the other ships. If you would care to take the bridge of the *Orion*, sir?"

Commander Bartlett shook his head.

"No, thank you, Captain. I have selected the *Pollux* as temporary flagship."

"Very good, sir. We'll return to New Oslo, sir?"

"That's right."

The Captain, no ordinary spacemen being present, dropped a measure of his formality.

"We would all like to extend our congratulations, on your escape," he said. "And thanks for the landing beacon you lighted to signal us. Otherwise we might

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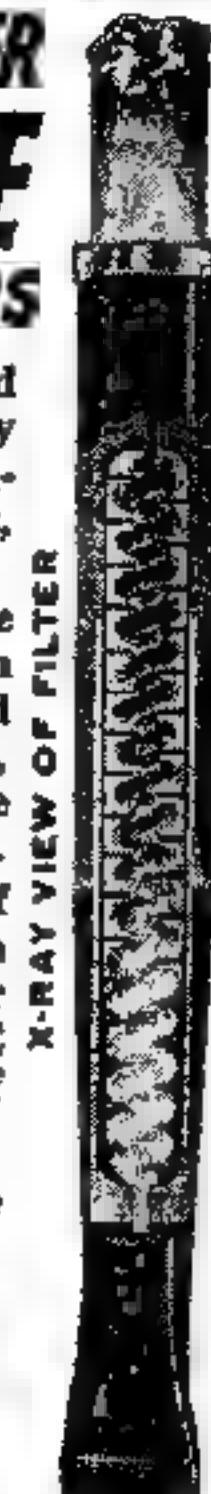
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never have found you."

Russ Bartlett grinned. "I'm afraid you're congratulating the wrong man, Captain. I was not responsible for the lighting of any flare. I didn't even know there was a flare. Perhaps my brother, Lieutenant Bartlett, C.T.C., can explain?"

There was pride in his voice, and in the gaze he turned upon Rick. Rick felt his cheeks warming gratefully. Some explanation, he knew, was due those who surrounded them. He said, "It—it was a desperate measure. I couldn't be

sure it would succeed, but it seemed to be worth trying—"

Red Halloway could no longer restrain his curiosity.

"How did you do it, Brains?" he demanded. "All we did was put sugar and busted-up cough drops in bags, and you and the Commander chucked 'em in the water—"

"Not water," corrected Rick Bartlett. "Sulphuric acid. That was what gave me the idea, you see."

"Our problem was to cause, in the darkness of Phoebus, a flame that would give the rescue ships a clue as to our location. We had no usual fire-making apparatus. Furthermore there are no inflammable substances on the surface of the satellite. And we had no access to the open air.

"But there ran through our dungeon a stream of acid which debouched into a surface pool. And we had on hand two substances, common sugar and potassium chlorate, a compound which forms the base of almost every pharmaceutical 'cough drop,' which, when combined with sulphuric acid, form a violently explosive, inflammable mixture.

"When we dumped these into the sulphuric stream in gelatinized sacks, we were gambling that they would reach the Outside before the sulphuric dissolved the containers. And as soon as that happened, combustion took place."

"Creating," nodded the man who had seen it, "a sudden pillar of flame that drew our attention. Most ingenious, Lieutenant. But dangerous."

RICK BARTLETT wished he had not said that.

"It was the only thing I could think of," he said apologetically.

A new voice spoke up, gruff but sturdy in his defense. The voice of Ned Murchison.

"Aw, it was better than good," growled the First Mate of the *Pollux*. "Trouble with you other spacehounds is you haven't the Brains we've got on the *Poll!* Us, we've got us a real set."

The danger was over now. There was no particular reason why Rick Bartlett's knees should have felt so strangely weak, or why his eyes should be so confounded misty, here in the clear-cut crispness of Phoebus' atmosphere.

Because they would be returning to Io City soon. There would be honors from an appreciative Advisory Council. Medals, a Commendation.

But these rewards, Rick Bartlett knew as he glanced about him, seeing the friendliness in the eyes of his own shipmates, would be superfluous, an anti-climax. Because he had already won that which he wanted most.

From behind, Ned Murchison gave Rick Bartlett a nudge.

"Come on Brain," he growled. "Just because you pulled a slick stunt, do you think that gives you any excuse to stand around all night shootin' the wind about it? Let's go aboard, you lug."

Rick Bartlett turned savagely.

"Who're yuh shovin'?" he demanded.

Frank Dover promptly closed in from behind and the three, a tangle of arms and legs, fell into a nearby snow drift. For a few minutes they struggled mightily. Then Rick Bartlett combined forces with Murchison and helped to shove Dover so deep into the snow that he yelled for mercy. Then they pulled him out and all three walked off, arm in arm.

Rick Bartlett was happy now. At last he was really a member of the *Pollux*!



A Legion of Vanishing Men Threatens Civilization Until Inventor Philip Hardsty Pierces the Shroud of Mystery in THE INVISIBLE ARMY, an Amazing Complete Novelet by Ross ROCKLYNNE Next Issue!



LOOKING THINGS IN THE FACE

PERHAPS Narcissus mooning over his reflected beauty in a still pool is the first classic example of the use of a mirror by mankind. Since then, many and varied have been the means used to reflect light. The ancients used polished speculums (or speculae) of



bronze, brass, and other metals. In the past few hundred years glass has become the universal medium.

Formerly the backs of glass mirrors were coated with a tin amalgam. Since, silver has become the best reflecting element. And now comes his majesty—aluminum.

Silver, evaporated by the latest process onto the front surface of the mirror from an electric filament, reflects ninety-five percent of the incident light, the highest score to date. Aluminum, on its initial score, reflects only eighty-eight percent. But after six months the aluminum mirror is as efficient as ever, whereas the silver job deteriorates considerably. Hence, aluminum today makes the best mirror.

Will some kind housewife please pass the frying pan? I want to powder my nose.

THE BLACK HAND AGAIN?

RECENT research in the dermatological field reveals a rather surprising fact about antisepsis of the skin. It isn't necessary to be constantly washing your hands to protect yourself from

disease germs picked up by direct contact. Nature has equipped us with a condition which might be called "acid skin" which is deadly to most types of germs.

While many things have been known about bacteria and viruses for years, and their tenacity for life under heat and cold conditions, nothing was known as to how they would behave if put on human skin and allowed to dry there.

What happens is that type A and type B viruses succumb within ten minutes. Virus solutions strong enough to kill half a billion mice lost, under tests, all disease-producing capacity. This means that the fear of hand-to-hand and then hand-to-mouth contact and transfer of germs is relatively unimportant after all.

So, while we should still guard against the cough and sneeze method of spraying disease, we won't have to worry about Junior keeping his hands so clean.

Now, if science will only come forward with a scheme to get around that Saturday night bath, boyhood will take on greater meaning.

DOSING SWEET CORN

NOW that Golden Bantam corn has had its inning, garden or sweet corn comes forward for its share of attention. To overcome that destructive pest known as the earworm, science has gone back to the oil-dosing era of Dad's childhood.

Thanks to the extensive investigations of L. A. Carruth of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, it has been proven that an effective barricade is laid down between the earworm larvæ and the tender, juicy kernels of corn by the simple single treatment of administering one drop of mineral oil in the

silk channels within the corn-husk tips of each ear.

The refined white oil destroys the pest more effectually than all previous



methods and insecticidal sprays because it requires but one treatment and leaves no poisonous residue—as in the case of lead arsenate sprays.

A satisfactory device to administer the oil has been invented by J. L. Brann, Jr., consisting of a tiny medicine dropper attached to a knapsack container of the oil carried on the worker's shoulders.

Come, Junior, have you had your dose of oil this generation? (And this is meant to be strictly corny.)

A SHOT OF DRY ICE

EVERYONE knows that a bullet, despite the trappings of metal and chemicals, gets its impetus and velocity from the power of suddenly expanding gases. Such by the way, is the effect of hand grenades and blockbusters.

Comes now a new rifle hard on the heels of the Garand weapon which gets its power from dry ice. Carbon dioxide, in crushed form, exerts a constant pressure of more than eleven hundred pounds per square inch. The magazine of this new gun, invented by Ray J. Monner of Denver, Colo., can fire the gun about two thousand times, and the inventor says he can utilize this expansive force in such a way that his gun will match the fire-power of any rifle using powder for ammunition.

Thus, on a single charge, the new gun is ready for several days' shooting, and at a cost of about one-fifth that of the more orthodox method at present employed. The weapon has been made available to the U. S. Government.

When you shoot that gun at me, mister, please surround my charge of dry ice with a few ounces of Tom Collins.

THAT GOLDEN GLOW

SCIENTIFIC observations have shown for a long time that there are certain glows in the atmosphere surrounding the earth, noticeable at night, and for a long time attributed to the electromagnetic phenomena of the auroras.

More exhausting research, as presented by Dr. C. T. Elvey and Dr. Alice Farnsworth, indicate that, besides the red and green glow originating about three hundred miles high in the atmosphere and caused by the excitation of oxygen atoms high above the earth, there is a third hue in the night sky. This is a yellow sodium glow originating from fifty to one hundred miles above the earth's surface.

We had the red and green of the traffic light, and now the cautionary yellow has been discovered. Somebody page King Midas.

FLYING REFRIGERATORS

AFTER every war there is a temporary economic lag and period of readjustment. For instance, after the present war, it is calculated that there will be an immediate market for more than a million motor cars, electric irons, washing machines, sewing machines, and so forth. The principal trouble will be in the getting them made, not the selling.

At the same time, there will be many items made for war purposes which will not be readily convertible to peacetime purposes. Among these is the military plane.

One enterprising firm has a practical answer to this. Instead of moving bulky fast-freezing machinery to the crop to be picked and quickly frozen, the new plan is to fit high-altitude planes with cargo racks, load them with fresh fruits and vegetables, and carry them in a fast climb to 15,000 feet. Here the air ducts to the food compartments are to be opened to the air which is colder than the coldest freezers, and the stuff will be frozen almost instantly. Then the openings can be closed, and the planes can glide in, and the stuff quickly removed to the regular storehouses.

And the best part of all this, is that the plan will work—economically. Pilot, will you kindly reach for an extra ten thousand feet of altitude? I want to freeze this glass of lemonade into an after-dinner ice.

EXPLODING STARS

EVERY so often in this department of scientifacts we get around to mentioning some astronomical oddity. The lesson for this issue concerns cosmic explosions—the creating of "supernovæ." According to Dr. Fritz Zwicky, of the California Institute of Technology, a star explosion takes place about once every 450 years to each galaxy.

The first "supernova" known to astronomical science was discovered November 11, 1572, by the famous Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe. This was the discovery of a star as bright as Venus in the constellation Cassiopeia. Supernovæ are stars which explode with such force as to radiate for several months as much light and heat as a million suns.

To answer the question of how often a supernova is created in a given island universe of stars, Dr. Zwicky set up a special photographic telescope at Mount Palomar to photograph on every clear moonless night as many as possible of several thousand listed galaxies. In the course of his study, Dr. Zwicky discovered only twelve supernovæ. By statistical analysis he was able to make his mathematical estimate of a star blowing up to form such a "super-sun" in the average galaxy once in 450 years.

That gives old Sol a fifty-fifty chance that he will avoid such a headache for more than one hundred billion years.

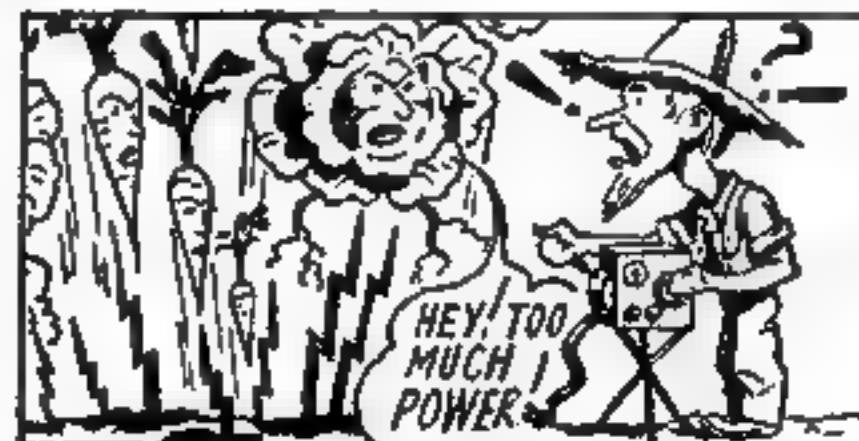
But it's the uncertainty of that "fifty-fifty" stuff that bothers us. How are you feeling this morning, Sol? Would you like an ice-cap?

ELECTRIC FARMING

A GREAT deal of emphasis is laid nowadays on the coming age of plastics. What, asks the electrician, of the coming of age of electricity? The latest suggested use in the realm of sci-

ence for electricity is to draft this wonderful and powerful servant of mankind for the farm—and not in the mechanical power way you might think.

Experiments have already been made of the treatment of soil directly with electricity, in the form of current. The results have been highly gratifying, resulting in the elimination of undesirable weeds and insect pests on the one



hand, and the improvement of the quality of flax and other plants, on the other.

Besides lighting our homes and running our mechanized machinery, electricity will now rejuvenate and fertilize our soil, and do weeding and insecticide work between cycles. What a farm-hand!

Oh, waiter, please re-vegetate my soup; just a couple of volts.

LAND OF LIGHT

HERE are some surprising statistics. According to data from the 1940 Census of Housing, more than three-fourths of all dwelling units in the United States are lighted by electricity. And, oddly enough, the highest percentage is in our formerly wild and wooly West, with farm houses wired for electricity being over 57 percent, and city homes being over 98 percent. The heaviest percentage of gas lighting is found in city homes in the North.

This universal use of electricity brings to mind an interesting comparison. In ancient Egypt the mightiest Pharaoh had less energy at his command than the output of a single modern power plant. The combined energy of America's central power systems is the greatest in the history of the world, equaling forty-six million kilowatts. This is more constant power than 650 million able-bodied slaves could produce—for even a few

minutes at a time. And this is just one item of the many modern developments to emancipate manpower.

YOU'RE NOT SO OLD, FATHER WILLIAM!

OFF and on in this department hormones and vitamins and glands and longevity crop up. Dr. Harry Benjamin, formerly of the College of the City of New York has reported some recent findings.

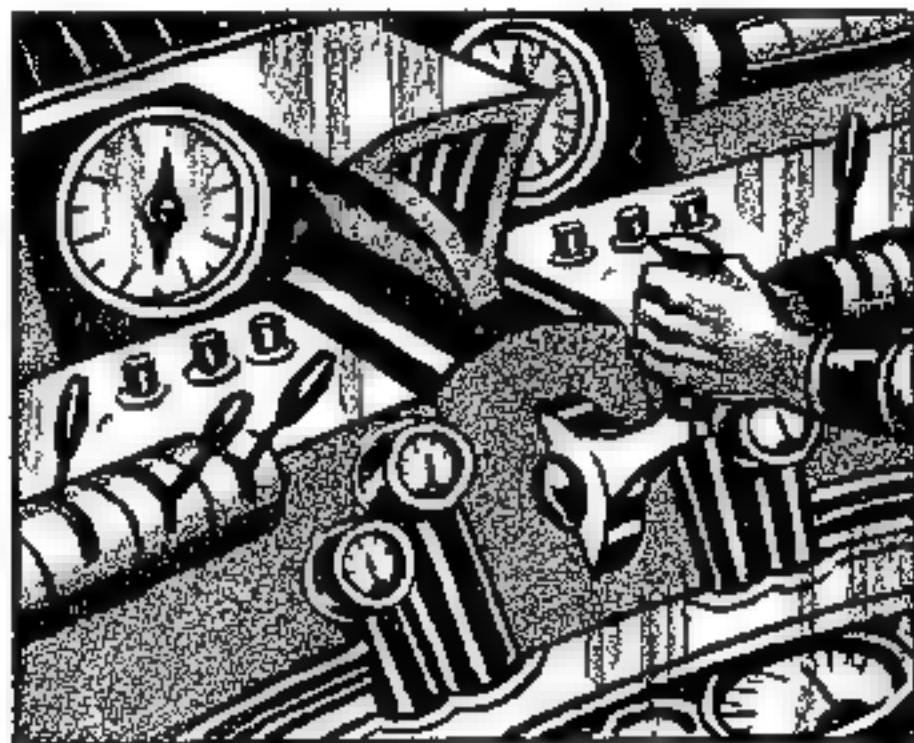
In applying specific hormone treatments for the purpose of preventing and slowing of the progressive condition known as old age, he reports that 76

percent of the 780 patients treated, both male and female, showed beneficial improvement.

This is definitely a direct step in the direction of lengthening the span of human life, without the statistics of baby saving to make the average seem longer. The name gerontotherapy has been proposed by Dr. Benjamin to designate this new science in the treatment for aging.

While a great deal of deep research is still essential to understand the causes of advancing senility and decay, at last science is on the way to achieve the dream of ancient alchemists.

Will somebody please drop Ponce de Leon a postal card?



HEADLINERS IN THE NEXT ISSUE

WE START the rockets blasting next issue with **A GOD NAMED KROO**, by that favorite author, Henry Kuttner. Kroo is one of the lesser ancient gods of China, and what he does for Dr. Horace Danton and to the Japs in the Burma area will have you howling with laughter. And there's something magnificent and grand about him, too.

* * * *

ON DECK as a companion novelet is a stirring story of spatial travel and problems of astrogation with a great deal of thought and human characterization in it. You will find **SPACE COMMAND**, by Robert Arthur, one of the most gripping stories of adventure and peril beyond the atmosphere that you have ever read.

* * * *

NEXT on the cargo manifest is **THE INVISIBLE ARMY**, a novelet by Ross Rocklynne, whose **EXILE TO CENTAURI** appeared in the last issue of **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**. In this exciting tale of a Nazi invasion which threatens the realm of science and sanity as well as the citadel of liberty, Phil Hardesty comes to grips with a deadly menace which will thrill you and chill you at the same time that it will make you think anew of the possibilities of the electron-microscope.

* * * *

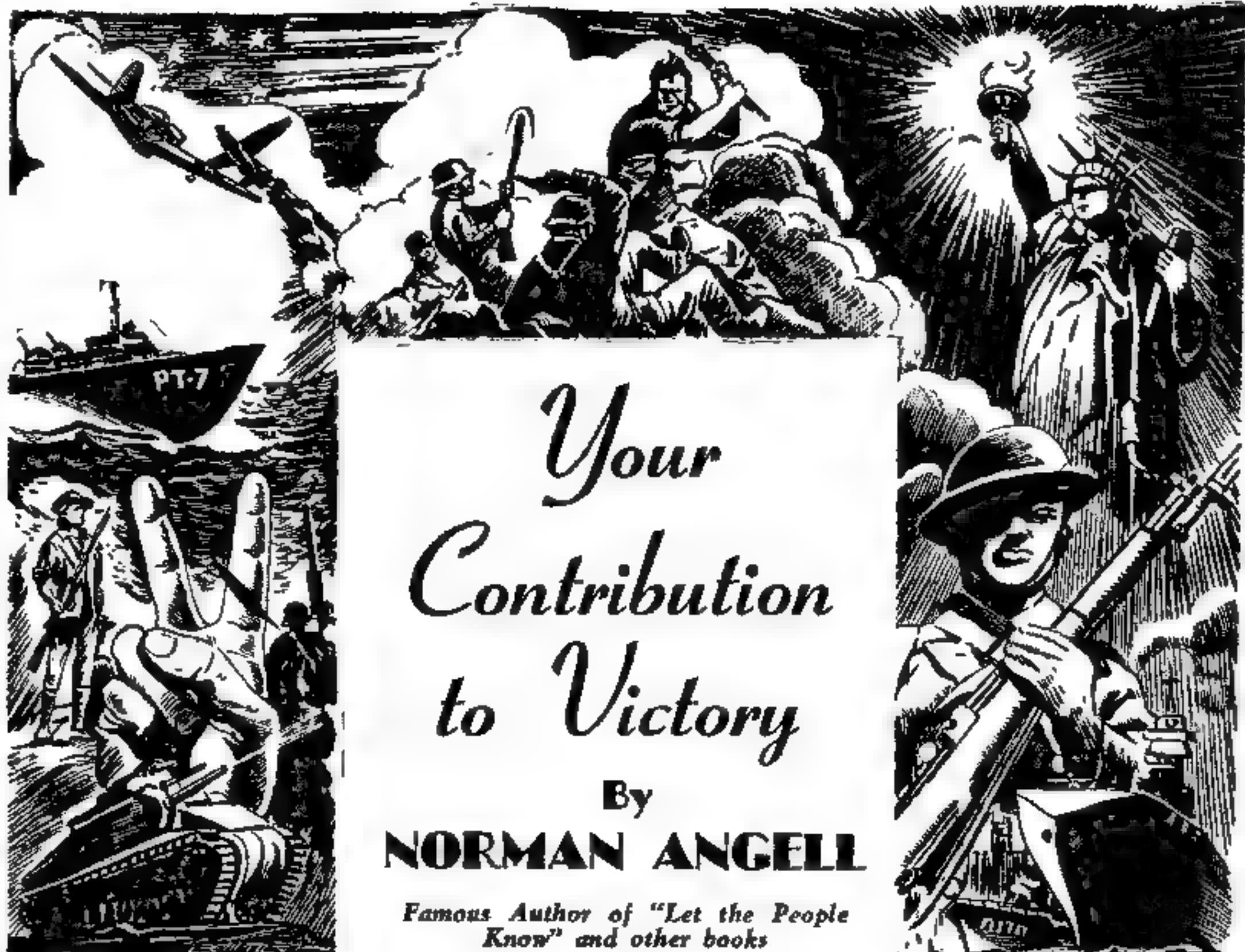
DOWN for the fourth spot in next issue's manifest is an exceptional Amateur Prize-winning Story called **MOON TRAP**, by John Foster West. This tale by a brand new author deals with an exploit on our lunar satellite.

* * * *

EFFECTIVE balancing of the cargo is achieved in the other shorts and articles and departments and announcements which you will find sprinkled through the book. It will be a gala issue from cover to cover, featuring your favorite authors and artists.

* * * *

READERS still Speak, and Sergeant Saturn will be on hand and in great fettle in the astrogation chamber to ride herd on the letter department and keep the more vociferous kiwis and junior peebots in line. Until then, he is toughening up for the fray with plenty of Xeno.



Your Contribution to Victory

By

NORMAN ANGELL

Famous Author of "Let the People Know" and other books

ARGUMENTS about who won the last war and who is doing most to win this, are usually very much to be deprecated. But a friendly competition as to which people is managing to make the best monetary contribution might have its uses as a stimulant to the War Bond and Stamp Campaign.

Britain has pushed her income tax in the higher brackets up to as much as 97½% and has introduced a system of deferred payment of salaries and wages. Payment of both in certain cases is withheld and will be made available as savings at the end of the war.

The American campaign for bonds and stamps is an attempt to do in a voluntary way what has been done partly by law in Britain. It would be a fine testimony to the capacity of the American people for that voluntary cooperation which is of the essence of democ-

racy if this campaign succeeded so well that no compulsory savings were necessary.

Furthermore, we are all discussing these days the post-war settlement; but one of the chief features of the post-war settlement should be provision against a post-war depression.

The War Bond Campaign is not merely a war measure; it is a measure of post-war settlement, a means of holding back purchasing power until that moment of time when it will be most needed, the time of post-war reconstruction spending then of the money saved—and increased—by bonds, will be a first class means of giving a stimulant to business and preventing depression to Bond buyers, of a means both of beating the enemy and of seeing that his onslaught does as little damage as possible to our societies in the difficult and dangerous post-war period.

A WAR BOND MESSAGE FOR ALL AMERICANS!



The screen lighted up. A head and shoulders appeared

THAT'S JUST LIKE A MARTIAN

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Meet Rugged Individualist Patch Merrick, Sentimental Scientist Zaarrgon, and Spoiled Darling Morgana Conti in the First of a New Series of Stories of Adventure Amid the Mysterious Asteroids

MARS is practical about prisoners, as about all things else. It was really a compliment to Zaarrgon, suspending him in the block-ray; but it was also necessary, for Zaarrgon was the type of individual who must be held for grim justice's sake.

He had violated nobody knew how many rules of scientific conduct. A trusted technician of the jealously guarded water-synthesis system maintained by both government and private

enterprise, he had gone to Phobos, closest of the two tiny Martian moons. There he had found and shipped back valuable water-producing minerals.

At home, he began to synthesize at once. Then he released this supply, without orders, to drought-stricken paupers on the northern desert. Their frantic pleas sounded too desperate to wait for government approval, and he piped the water along, saving lives—none of them scientifically precious—

and a trifle of vegetation, which his superiors had planned to abandon.

This was sentimental and Mars is too grimly thirsty a world to excuse sentimentality. Anyway, misuse of scientific apparatus or supplies is punishable, under Martian law, by death.

In an upper chamber of the great administration building at Ekadome, in a high pinnacle that towered above the massed tenements, the sky-aspiring travel-ways, the landing stages, the battlements that are aeons old, a buzzing little camera-device shed a great cone of light. In the midst of it lay Zaarrgon, silent and motionless.

He was small and frail, even for a Martian. Like most advanced members of his race, he had been surgically made over to approximate in general outline and function the more handy Terrestrial figure. His bladder body was corseted into something like a torso, his two lower tentacles were strengthened by jointed tubes to serve as legs, and their tips inserted in metal boots. Two upper tentacles served as arms, sleeved properly in his tunic, and upon harness-braced shoulders was a pink chrysanthemum of head, tufted with sensitive flesh-petals that housed the awareness-power which serves a Martian for eyes, nose, and mouth.

He could twitch no tentacle, inhale no air, speak no metallic word through the artificial voice-box in his breathing hole. The ray in which he bedded took away those powers, took away the very sense of them. All Zaarrgon could do was think.

By rights, he should think rueful, self-abnegating thoughts of his misbehavior and the certain and merited punishment. But Zaarrgon's mind, unfettered from his ray-lulled body, roamed in other channels. The poor folk of the desert, reprieved by his illegal gift of moisture, would know of his death in their service.

Life is cheap on Mars, but high-ranking scientific officers don't often throw their own lives away. He judged that a few, only a few, of the rescued paupers would be impressed. They might strive

to be more than poor and obscure. Perhaps they might be interested in his own case, enough to study it, to come across what he had always conned and pondered, even to take up the study where he was leaving off. Several brains, even ordinary brains, would be better than one.

As for himself, he'd been about to die, anyway. A medical authority had told him that he could not live long in the vibration-zone of Mars. He must seek smaller, less sunshiny worlds. And the government would never have discharged him on plea of poor health. Zaarrgon, at ease in his ray captivity, had little to regret and less to repent. Beyond that, he had what Terrestrials call a trump card. . . .

IN THE great landing-stage that lies like a roof upon Ekadome's upper levels, a silvery-sleek rocket cruiser came to rest. Attendants ran out to it. The hatch-panel opened, and forth came a tall, lusty Terrestrial with a certain gay savagery manifest in his dark face.

"Cruiser *Omen*," he reported to the senior clerk, a supple Martian. "Patch Merrick, owner and pilot, from the Saturnian system."

"Welcome, Missterr Merrick," purred the clerk. "We have hearrd of yourr exploitss therre—discovery of Z-metal and yourr rrisse to wealth."

Merrick grinned harshly. The wealth-conscious inner planets would surely know of that, and find it convenient to forget his earlier adventures, but he remembered.

He was out of place in the thirtieth century, to which no gypsies as such, had survived. He had first entered the *Omen* as a stow-away, and when the *Omen* was wrecked on a certain wild asteroid, he had become leader and schemer to keep the hapless company alive. He had made a debtor and dependent out of Coburn Conti, once director of Spaceways, Inc., and a frank worshipper out of Conti's daughter Morgana, who had the loveliest gray eyes and the most arrogant manner on all the habitable worlds. Thus, when

help came and the *Omen* was repaired, he'd stolen the ship and fled, to escape the rewards of Conti's money and Morgana's admiration.

For Patch Merrick valued personal freedom above luxury and wealth. It was fate, fantastic even for outer worlds, that had cast him among the Z-metal prospectors and made him embarrassingly rich and important. Z-metal was needed for speed-precision machinery, and he knew that he was responsible to the System for it. He hoped, however, that he need not now assume too much responsibility. . . .

"Patch!" cried a voice as silvery as a bell, as triumphant as a trumpet. "Old Cross Patch, who ran away from me! And now you've come back!"

He faced her—Morgana. The savagery went out of his face, and embarrassment dawned in its stead.

"Where did you come from?" he mumbled, inwardly quivering.

"Didn't you think the whole System has buzzed with your adventures and successes?" she cried, all glorious smiles. "I knew about you—found out when you'd arrive, and I waited. Now," and her arm glided through his, "you won't get away again."

Patch Merrick, in the old days, had heard such words from Martian and Terrestrial police who did not sympathize with his unorthodox ways. He had never felt so helpless in their hands as in Morgana's. He thrilled at her touch—she was lovely—but a terrible dread clutched his heart. Had he returned to be trapped by civilization at last?

"Come," she urged. "Daddy will want to see you and congratulate you. He's sitting in judgment."

"Judgment?" repeated Merrick. "On what?"

"Yes. In the administration building. Daddy wouldn't stay retired, he's chief Terrestrial administrator for Martian Hydro Limited. And I'm also a director. We're operators of public resources and influential adherents of the Martio-Terrestrial League. So we're officers, technically, of that part of the government. To us, because the Martians can't un-

derstand, comes a report and request for judgment on this Zaarrgon—"

"Who's Zaarrgon?" demanded Merrick. "And why can't Martians understand?"

"Because he doesn't act like a Martian. Come along."

She took him to an elevator, along a covered travel-way in a surface-car, and to the office where her big, grizzled father waited.

CONTI had once helped Merrick steal the *Omen*, because he did not think that Morgana would be happy with a fundless rebel. But now he rose with a beaming face and outstretched hand.

"Patch, my boy! Delighted to see you. What a fine record you're making!"

Merrick shook hands, grimly aware that his Z-metal made himself so welcome. Conti said other things, cordial and confident—how much he hoped to learn from Merrick, how profitable and cozy it would be if Merrick came into Martian Hydro, Inc., and what a fine-looking pair Merrick and Morgana made. Then they all sat down, and Conti and Morgana quickly reviewed the case of Zaarrgon, the Martian whose crime baffled his fellow-Martians.

"It's clear that he's guilty," summed up Conti, "but why is a cold-brained Martian sorry for anyone? It's not that he's sorry, they say. There's a deeper reason, and they think Terrestrial viewpoints can find it."

"Zaarrgon was bound to die," reminded Morgana. "His illness is a fatal one, might become painful. Perhaps he figures on a painless death—just like a Martian."

Merrick frowned. "But," he protested, "if Zaarrgon's just a death-hungry invalid, wouldn't he blow off his flowery head? Honorable, by Martian standards. He must have had a real reason for releasing the water. You say he got it from Phobos?"

Conti shook his head. "Only the water-fixing elements. Phobos is full of them, but they're hard to mine, and they're all needed for regular channels of use." He fixed Merrick's eye with

his. "You credit Zaarrgon with humanity, Patch, my boy. But Martians are inhuman, and glory in the fact. This starved world of theirs makes them so. Morgana, what else do we know about Zaarrgon?"

Morgana studied notes. "He was interested in asteroids—another un-Martian trait. The asteroids are adjudged to belong neither to the Martio-Terrestrial nor the Jovian system governments, until more is learned about them. That wasn't Zaarrgon's job, or his business. He had no reason to dig into their mysteries."

"Why not?" Patch Merrick wanted to know.

"Because," said Conti, "Martians stick to their own assignments. Zaarrgon's business was water-synthesis and water-preservation, mighty important on this thirsty planet. Let astronomers and astro-archaeologists worry about the asteroids. Yet Zaarrgon seems to have shown sentimentality and curiosity in un-Martian degrees. Unnatural."

"When it comes to talk of business," pursued Merrick, "what business is it of ours to advise on Zaarrgon's fate?"

"Oh!" sighed Morgana, a little distractedly. She was joyous and thrilled to see Patch Merrick again, but she was finding him difficult. "We're officials of Hydro, Patch. Terrestrial money put us there, but officials have a governmental status on Mars. It's our water that Zaarrgon tampered with. We have a voice and an obligation."

The door opened, and a Martian entered. His name was Sskirr. He was Conti's First Advisor, and fresh from a conference of his own.

"The greetingss of the judiciary authorrity," he slurred out through his artificial voice-box. "They rrecommend that Zaarrgon die, forr the ssake of sscience. It iss not often that an individual of ssuch ssientific attainment iss killed, and many rresearchers will be glad forr the chance to dissect hiss ssuperior thought-ganglia."

"That's the closest to sense I've heard yet, which isn't saying much," groaned Merrick. "If the purpose of legal execu-

tion is to get high-type specimens for medical study, why not frame the Martian Ruler himself? He should be interesting?"

SSkirr was shocked, and his quivering face-petals showed it, but he only continued his report. "Telepathic sstudy of Zaarrgon's thought processs rreveals that he hass no prroperr apprreciation of the grravity of hiss misdeed. He iss wrrapped in contemplation of the assteroidss."

"Asteroids?" repeated Conti. "We haven't anything to do with them, until the claims of Jupiter and the League are examined and settled. I'm afraid that Zaarrgon's better out of the way."

"Excuse me," said Merrick, suddenly rising. "I'm going for a little stroll on the battlements. Maybe I can capture some rationality."

"I hope so," called Morgana pointedly, but gazing possessively after his departing broad shoulders.

THE battlements outside towered almost a mile above the red-rusty desert plain. Above was the momentous shade of landing platforms. Merrick strode along a railed footway, and then paused to lean his big forearms on the topmost rail and stare across the distances.

Desert, that was Mars. Barely a quarter of the planet's surface was vegetated, and that only by herculean efforts of irrigation and planting and care. The value of water on Mars was rather higher than the value of blood anywhere else. And Zaarrgon had transgressed, had wasted the precious liquid, and must be punished. His arresters and accusers were not vindictive, but they were in deadly earnest.

Meanwhile, Zaarrgon was un-Martian in another respect—his curiosity about what did not concern him. Who, indeed, could be legitimately concerned for the Asteroids? They were tiny crumbs of mineral rock, circling the sun in a band between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, claimed by both planets but not fought or even argued over because they were not worth too much fight and argument.

A few of the largest—Ceres, Pallas, Juno, Vesta, Eros—had settlements of a sort, that bore allegiance to nobody. And even these were hardly practical in the development of the cosmos. Where did this Zaarrgon get off, worrying about the Asteroids and causing others to worry about him?

Asteroids . . . Merrick remembered how he had adventured on one. A stow-away and fugitive from Terrestrial law, because he'd rather be a woodland hermit than a pillar of Thirtieth-century society, he had been aboard the ship of Coburn Conti that was cast away on a little detached hillock in space. He, Merrick, had taken command because he'd learned how to live without civilization.

And Morgana Conti had come out of it loving him. He'd fled from that into what he hoped was obscurity, and stumbled upon rich Z-metal findings on Titan of the Saturnian system. He'd let himself become possessed by wealth, had come back to the inner planets, and to Morgana. Here he was, not happy about it in any particular.

ABRUPTLY he went away from there, restlessly seeking vehicles, travelways, elevators. Already he felt the cramping hand of civilization tightening about him. On the landing-stage above, he ordered his cruiser out. He rocketed away, tossing stratospheric miles over his shoulder like apple-peelings. He came to the northern desert where Zaarrgon had given water illegally.

It wasn't a desert any more. He could see that even from high up, as he descended to the rocket port. The desert was green, as Martian deserts always turn green with even minutes of encouragement. Old-fashioned, disused canal beds held trickles of moisture, little antlike figures toiled and bustled around furrowed plots and fields. There were miles of dead ground become cultivable nad cultivated. Yes, and here and there, a patch of misty cloud, promising a spatter of rain.

In the port administration cubicle, he

found an overworked official, a grim young Terrestrial who answered his questions:

"Oh, the water's always here, what time it doesn't evaporate and slide clear out of Martian gravity-pull. That moisture-fixing stuff that was turned loose here against orders keeps it condensing and working, the same water many times over."

"The land looks wonderful," complimented Merrick. "Almost like Earth."

"Because we're trying Terrestrial crops. Nitrogen plantings, and cereals. We might as well, since the water must not be wasted. It was really destined for the sub-polar regions."

"No people there," pointed out Merrick. "And I see lots of them here. Hard at work."

"Yes, the paupers." The official sounded contemptuous. "We couldn't waste them, either. The government provided harnesses and leg-tubes and so on, to make them adequate for farm labor."

"I see. And they'd have died otherwise?"

"Or they'd have been transferred to other areas, on doles and so on. Thanks for being interested, but do you mind going now? I've got a triple job of work to do."

Merrick went back. High in the stratosphere, he glanced up and saw the two moons of Mars overhead, jagged little clods less than ten miles in diameter. Small, barren, yet one and perhaps both held reprieving water-powers for Mars. Zaarrgon was accused of criminal waste. Yet his crime had reclaimed desert, had given people life and work and respectability. Was that so bad?

Merrick realized that his own outdated preferences were at work, and flying rebelliously in the face of Martian method and law. He returned to Ekadome, having been gone less than an hour.

"Refuel this cruiser, and get provisions aboard," he told the attendants. Then he descended to the very battle-

ment from which he had departed.

Someone had come out looking for him—Sskirr.

"The Marrtian divission of the Marrtio-Terresstrrial League takess verry ssehriously the casse of Zaarrgon. We arre grrateful forr the chance to treferr hiss behaviorr to Terresstrrialss."

"I'd like to know more of his thoughts," said Merrick.

"That can be arranged," said Sskirr. "Come with me."

ZAARRGON, floating in space, was thinking:

Asteroids . . . gravelly obstruction band between inner and outer planets . . . the largest five hundred miles through, the smallest only a whirling boulder . . . whence did they come?

Into his mind stole an answer, spoken it seemed by another thought process:

"They came from the explosion of a planet, of course. Their jagged formations show that. It's generally accepted, isn't it? But what I'm wondering is why you got into this jam."

Zaarrgon digested that. He pondered an answer:

"I wonder, too. Not that I acted in caprice, only because I thought it well that thirsty creatures should drink a little now. Isn't the end of Mars certain, and why should I slow or hasten it? Yet who are you and how do you communicate?"

Again foreign thoughts came to him: "You're in the block-ray. It freezes your motions and senses, which leaves more clear-cut your pure thoughts. That is why they can be picked up on the thought-detector. You've been studied for many hours by legal minds. I happen to be a Terrestrial official by the name of Merrick. I have a voice in deciding your fate."

"I am too well-mannered to ask or suggest concerning that fate," Zaarrgon concentrated on replying. "In any case, my unauthorized use of water hastened by a small bit the ultimate death of this world. Dead words pre-occupy me. I ponder a world not only dead, but dismembered."

"The asteroids?"

"The asteroids. Broken, crumbs of what must once have been a huge planet. As you say, the jagged form of the asteroids establishes the fact of their being remnants of a breaking-up, else they would be round, like Earth or Mars, or Earth's moon."

"So? How do you explain the moons of Mars? Diemos and Phobos are jagged in shape."

"It is something beyond my study. Even though I was stationed on Phobos, at the water-synthesis plant there. I am unfortunate in being interested in things far from my home."

"Good-by, Zaarrgon," came the thoughts of Patch Merrick. "You may hear from me again."

Zaarrgon returned to his own meditations. If anyone had remained on the thought-detector he would have been further mystified, for Zaarrgon meditated on the peculiar Terrestrial custom of registering triumph by a strange upward quirk of the mouth-corners.

MERRICK was back in the conference room. "That little Martian is in the clear," he said.

Conti stared, Morgana gasped, Sskirr vibrated his tentacles and face-petals.

"In the clear?" repeated Conti. "He can't be. We must make an example of him. The Martian side of the League government is anxious for that."

"Mars is too methodically just," flung back Merrick. "It won't turn Zaarrgon over to disectors simply because he gave away water—if the water didn't belong to the Martian government, anyway."

"Eh?" grunted Conti. "Didn't belong? But he got that hydroite shipment from Phobos, our own development."

"Phobos, yes. But Phobos isn't Martian territory. At least, a clever defense legate could claim that."

"Patch Merrick, you're utterly mad," exploded Morgana. "I wonder why I love you."

"Phobos isn't a regular satellite, as Luna is of Earth, or it would be round. But it's jagged. In other words," wound

up Merrick impressively, "it's an asteroid—probably Diemos, too—drawn into the Martian gravitational influence ages ago, but originally part of the world that exploded into asteroids! And, according to present agreement, the asteroids aren't possessions of any planetary government, but a free, unclaimed bunch of—"

"Hsst!" That was Sskirr, agonized and pleading. They all faced him.

"No morre of ssuch talk, I beg," he quavered. "Long have ourr governrnment headss hushed up ssuch ssuggestionss, forr fearr that Diemoss and Phoboss would be called non-Martian—fair game forr filibussterring ssettlement, as pirrate lairrss or enemy bassess."

"Thunder, that's so!" excitedly chimed in Conti. "And Martian Hydro has sunk a world of money in the mines there. Look, Patch, this mustn't get out."

"If it mustn't get out," said Merrick coolly, "little Zaarrgon must."

"Let him go?" cried Conti. "But we can't, we're only advisory! The judiciary must act!"

"Then he'll stand a final trial, and make the claim I just outlined."

"How did you find out?" demanded Morgana.

Patch looked at her quizzically. "I planned it myself, darling. Hang it, I like that little squid-formed fellow. He is guilty of mercy and romance, and so would I be. If he's going to be tried, I'll give him that defense."

Conti started to his feet. "You traitor!"

"Easy does it," warned Merrick. "People don't call me names." He put a big hand on Conti's shoulder and, without seeming to make an effort, pushed him back into his seat. "Be reasonable, and so will I. Get Zaarrgon out of it."

"You'll answer for this idiocy to me," promised Morgana, beautifully baleful.

Merrick affected to ignore her. His eyes were on Conti, waiting for a reply.

But it was Sskirr who had the inspiration.

"Missterr Merrick iss rright. Let him go, without any legal trouble. Let

him escape. The ray iss hiss only guarrd, and—"

"Splendid!" cried Conti, rubbing his big hands together. "Sskirr, take charge. Get him a ship of sorts, and he can flee in it. Out in space, then—"

"Out in sspace ssomething will happen," finished Sskirr, who like most Martians was something of a mind-reader. "The sship can have a time-detonator attached to the fuel ssupply. And then Zaarrgon'ss ssecret defensse will die with him. All will be well."

"Too bad," sighed Morgana. "He was really a sort of attractive character."

Merrick got to his feet. "You make me sick," he began, and then shut up.

WHAT would his protests amount to? He could make an unpleasant scene, but government and wealth and practicality were all arrayed against him and the little prisoner of the ray. He made a gesture of resignation.

"Sskirr is a genius," he went on. "And I seem to be an idiot, by your standards. Mind if I wash my hands of this?"

He caught Morgana's gray, protesting stare. He winked at her, and went out. Sskirr followed him.

"What iss yourr intention?" the Martian demanded.

"To have a look at Zaarrgon in his prison," replied Merrick. "Martyrs aren't any too frequent these days, and I'd like to see one before I die."

"Ssssss . . ." buzzed Sskirr politely. "You arre making a Terresstrrial joke. Come, I will accompany you."

They went up to the tower where Zaarrgon was kept.

As Sskirr had said, there was no armed guard in the chamber, only the attendant in charge of the ray mechanism. When Merrick and Sskirr entered, the attendant buzzed a query.

"I was on the thought-detector in the next room, remember?" Merrick told him. "I neglected to come in to look at the ray mechanism, and I am curious. Odd, isn't it, that little camera affair generates power enough to suspend a weight like Zaarrgon's?"

Sskirr stood beside the attendant. "It can ssuspend even morre weight—twice as much," he informed Merrick.

"You don't say!" marveled Merrick innocently. "More weight. Twice as much."

He took a quick stride, got his hands on the device, and touched a button. The light blinked out, and Merrick swiveled the thing on its base before the two startled Martians could chatter out a protest. Another touch of the button, and Sskirr and the attendant were flooded by the white light. They stood silent and stiff in the midst of it, like two fish in a cake of ice.

Opposite, Zaarrgon rose to his feet from where he had been dropped to the floor. He purred, dusted himself, and confronted Merrick expectantly.

"Quick," said Merrick, and caught him by an arm tentacle, at the spot where the elbow should be. "We're leaving."

Together they hastened out to an elevator, and thence Merrick led the way to the landing-platforms where he summoned attendants.

"Roll out my cruiser!" he commanded.

While it was coming, he addressed Zaarrgon again. "You're off on a little trip of exile. The board discussed your case and decided—"

"That Phoboss iss an assterroid," finished Zaarrgon for him. "Which makess thingss embarrasssing—sso much sso, that I am being allowed to esscape to avoid being trried. I might talk too much at the trrial."

Merrick stared. "Don't tell me you have a thought-detector, too!"

The little flower-head shook. "No. Frrom the firrsst, I knew that ssuch a defensse would be valid. But I needed someone in yourr possition, Merrick, to offerr it forr me. A courrt of law might rreleasse me—but my health doess not prossperr on Marrss. I need to be ssent away. And sso I made carreful ssuggesstion to you, knowing that ssomething like thiss exile would be ssurreptitiously offered."

"Just like that, eh?" grunted Merrick. "What would you say if I told you that the plan was to give you a rocket set to

blow up in space?"

"I would ssay that I had arrranged forr that, too. The perrsson who rreleases me cannot remain to be arrressted ass an aiderr of outlaw fugitivess. He musst come along—and sso guarantee that my rocket iss ssound."

The cruiser was being rolled out. Merrick studied it. "Provisions, fuel, all aboard," he was saying. "You could fly to Saturn or further—wait a second! Something whizzed by me just then! What did you say about going with you?"

"If you have forrgotten, I have not," said Zaarrgon patiently. "Whoeverr rreleases me musst come underr blame and trrial by the law. You have chos-sen to be that one. Therfore, you musst alsso flee—and musst be surre that ourr sship iss a ssafe one. That iss a fine crruiser, Missterr Merrick. You sseem to have fitted it forr yourr own eesscape—without thinking."

"My own escape!" repeated Merrick, startled speculation in his fine eyes.

H E MUSED a moment.

Wealth. He had that. With it he could buy power, luxury, fame, hang-ers-on—all the things he had never wanted. He now had position and respect, because of his Z-metal holdings; but they demanded that he get into ticklish affairs and positions that he did not relish.

He had Morgana—no doubt of that, she loved him and wanted to marry him. But if she adhered to the policy of ruth-less rule that seemed inseparable from riches, what would happen to him? She would turn him from a nervy vagabond into a suitable husband who either forgot his heart for profit or else didn't dare dream out loud. . . .

"Morgana!" he muttered, regretfully.

"Yourr lady frriend?" prompted Zaarrgon. "Rreflect. Perrhapss you could face trrial. But could you face herr?"

"I couldn't," said Merrick, shuddering. "And why should I? There are other men for her, but there aren't more than two like us in the worlds."

"I know that," said Zaarrgon, nod-

ding gravely.

"You've thought out everything!" exclaimed Merrick. "Isn't that just like a Martian!"

They got into the space cruiser. Quickly Merrick checked controls, fuel-feed, supplies. Then he went to the televiso and turned a dial, while his companion saw to the closing of the ports.

The screen lighted up. Merrick fiddled and tuned. A head and shoulders appeared, clarified against the background of a plastic and chromium and synecloth boudoir. Morgana.

"Yes?" came her silvery voice, as she accepted the call. "Where are you, Patch? And have you come to your senses?"

"Yes indeed. Look, my dear. Somebody has to take the blame for letting Zaarrgon go. It'll be a serious charge to face. So you and your father blame me for everything."

"But they'll put you in prison—" she began.

"Oh, no, they won't!" He laughed with genuine good humor. "Because they won't find me! I'm going with Zaarrgon!"

Her response to this was a gasp of pain, and her face went white. "No, Patch! Please—" she began in swift protest.

"Good-by, darling," he cut her off quickly before she could get that deadly charm of hers working on him again. "You're a wonderful girl—too smart for me. But thanks for wanting to make me vice-president of your dad's financial empire."

There was a click as Merrick cut the connection. Morgana Conti stared into the dying silver screen, and her lovely eyes slowly filled with tears. Then her proud face hardened in determination, and her slim hands clenched tight.

"You just think you are going to escape from me this time, Patch Merrick," she whispered fiercely. "I'll follow you around the curvature of our light universe, if I have to, because—because—I love you. Damn you!"

Aboard the *Omen* Morgana's reply was never heard. Patch Merrick turned from the dead televiso and spoke to the queer individual he had rescued.

"Get her going, Zaarrgon. You're the astrogator. Where are we going?"

"Where can we be beyond the law and tampering?" asked the Martian as he began punching control buttons on the firing panel. "Only among the assteroids. Once a ssingle worrld, they arre now a hosst of worrldss with an unknown hisstory. We are going to ssolve the myssterry of the assteroids!"

They took off.



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By the light of the flame Randall could see the Phobian stalking him

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

By WILLIAM MORRISON

Kidnaped for Questioning by Martian Revolutionaries, Randall of the Interplanetary Police Works Out a Surprising Set of Answers

THE medal that Sam Randall wore across his chest had been given him by the head of the Interplanetary Police himself, for the display of unusual courage in the line of duty, and it should have been a sort of amulet to ward off fear, but it wasn't. At the moment, Sam Randall was very much afraid.

He could feel the round nose of the stubby atom-pistol in his side, and he

could imagine what a slight pressure of a finger on the trigger could do. If the little Martian had looked tougher, more sure of himself, he wouldn't have minded. But to be held up by a man who looked as if a sneeze would scare the wits out of him, and cause a tightening of the tendon that would set off the gun. . . .

Sam Randall could be glad of one thing. He didn't look afraid. None of the pass-

ersby could guess that he wasn't having a pleasant conversation with the little blue man at his side, and that should have calmed the latter's tremors somewhat. He even managed to make his voice casual as he asked, "What's the big idea?"

"Start walking," ordered the Martian.

"Where to?"

"Straight ahead. I'll tell you when to turn."

Randall started to walk, and the shriveled blue man kept pace with him, the nose of the gun never leaving his side. Several pedestrians turned to look at them, and Randall hoped the Martian wasn't getting nervous.

"Did I ever tell you that one," he began, "about the Irishman—"

He could see the little man jump.

"Skip it. Just keep your mouth shut, and walk."

"It's monotonous just walking along without saying anything. It's a good story. It starts off—"

He felt the gun digging into his side harder than ever, and he heard the voice, harsh and undoubtedly afraid. "Shut up!"

His own voice died away. They walked along in silence.

From time to time the little Martian gave him a curt direction. "Turn here," he would say, or, "Don't look back."

Randall knew the territory they were covering, but the Martian didn't seem to care, and that made things look bad. It made it seem that Randall wouldn't have a chance to retrace his path, ever.

JUST when he was beginning to feel tired, they reached a stretch of dark field.

"Straight ahead," came the order.

"But I can't see."

"I can. Straight ahead."

They moved on in the darkness. Randall was more uneasy than ever. He was certainly at a disadvantage now. The Martian could see by infra-red light, but he himself had to move blindly.

"I ought to eat more carrots," said Randall to himself gloomily, but he knew that Vitamin A, or no Vitamin A, the Martian would still have the advantage of him. There was plenty of infra-red around, and

to eyes that were sensitive to it, the whole field must seem brightly lighted.

After a time, he heard noises in the distance. Soon he could distinguish the sound of people talking.

"Hold it," said the Martian, and Randall stopped in time to keep from bumping into a space ship. Then he heard a port opening. He was urged ahead, and stumbled into the ship.

The port clanged again. He had the feeling that people were looking him over. Then some one was giving directions in a voice he hadn't heard before, and the ship rose from the ground. He cursed softly to himself. He wished fervently that he could see.

He couldn't even get a glimpse of the flames from the rocket tubes behind them. But after a time he could feel himself becoming light, and he knew that the ship was passing out of the field of Earth's gravity. When he was about half his usual weight, the artificial gravity went on, and from that time on, there was no further change.

When a dim red light was finally switched on, it was quite unexpected. He stared around him, and whistled. There were five men, all Martians, and one girl. Naturally, it was at her that he looked first. She had at least one-half Earth blood, possibly more, and she was a beauty.

He couldn't help that whistle of his. Any centenarian not a total wreck would probably have tried to whistle through toothless gums at seeing her.

Her face was stern, but she wasn't scowling as the men were. Now that the atom-gun was out of his side, Randall felt the courage flowing back into him.

"What's the big idea of snatching me?" he demanded. "I'm only a poor cop. I can't pay you enough of a ransom to make it worth your while."

One of the Martians spoke. He was buck-toothed, which was unusual among Martians, and his teeth had an unpleasant resemblance to fangs. "You will please hand over the map."

"Huh?"

"I am not joking. I want the map you took from that Irishman."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

The man's eyes gleamed with anger. So there was an Irishman somehow involved in this, thought Randall, and realized suddenly why the man who had kidnapped him had been so upset by his attempt at humor. He had thought Randall was trying to be funny at his expense.

The man spoke again. "Perhaps you have heard of me. I am Mungh Fahz."

"Sure I've heard of you. You're a crook." And then, as an afterthought: "Among other things," added Randall.

Mungh Fahz smiled, showing those fanglike teeth more clearly. "You realize then that when I ask for something, I am serious. Give it to me, please."

"I can't give you what I haven't got."

ANOTHER Martian interrupted. He was a little shorter than Mungh Fahz, and pleasanter looking, although no more pleasant in actuality. "Perhaps, Mungh Fahz, Mr. Randall would like to know why we are so sure the map is in his possession."

A shrug. "You may tell him, Duorr, if it pleases you."

"Last night," said Duorr, "you made an arrest."

"Oh, that Irishman. He was only a drunk. Petty nice guy, too. I was sorry I had to run him in."

"He was not a drunk. He deliberately had himself arrested."

Randall smiled. This was beginning to be funny. "Look, buddy," he replied. "Do you know what he talked to me about on his way to the station? About his dear old mother in good old Ireland, and how one Irishman was worth ten Martians, and again about his good old mother in dear old Ireland. He was as drunk as they come."

"He was pretending," contradicted Duorr coldly. "No doubt he had been drunk before, and he knew how to talk. He was running away from us. He knew that it was only a matter of hours before we caught him, and he had himself arrested so that in the police station he might be out of danger."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"This afternoon he died. The map was not on him."

Randall's eyes narrowed as he took in the meaning of the words. "You killed him. How?"

"He died. We know that he did not give the map to the jailer. You were the only other person who saw him. Therefore he must have given it to you."

"How do you know he didn't pass it over to some one else before I picked him up?"

"We know. He was watched."

Randall bit his lips. "What makes you so sure there was a map, anyway?"

It was Mungh Fahz's turn to interrupt. "It will do us no harm to tell you," he said harshly. "Sean O'Brien was a prospector. He paid a visit to Tellus-B, the planetoid that's also known as Mock-Earth."

Randall nodded. He had heard of this newly discovered planetoid that resembled Earth so closely in gravity and atmosphere.

Unfortunately, it was too far away from the sun to be colonized as otherwise it might have been. There were probably no more than half a dozen people on it at any one time.

"O'Brien discovered several deposits of mundite. The mineral has been sought for before, without success. O'Brien must have had methods of his own of finding the stuff. And once he found it, he must have made a map."

"How do you know he found it?"

"Because he became *really* drunk, and boasted of what he could do with it."

"How do you know it was he that was talking, and not the liquor?"

"He carried a tiny specimen of the mineral with him. Not enough to be dangerous, but enough to prove his story. We stole that and tested it to make sure. Unfortunately, we couldn't find the map. But the loss of the mundite warned him."

"Excuse me," said Randall politely at this point. "What the devil is mundite?"

"That," spat out Mungh Fahz, "is none of your business. Where is the map?"

Randall shrugged, and Duorr snapped suddenly, "Enough of this." He didn't look pleasant any more.

HE and Mungh Fahz exchanged glances, and a moment later a newcomer entered. At first Randall took this to be a man, but a second look made him realize it was a Phobian. This was a nerveless, almost brainless creature from Phobos, with a skin that was as near to steel in toughness as anything animate could be. Despite the smallness of the head, the Phobian was close to six feet in height, and Randall would stand no chance whatever in its hands. He knew that without having to be told.

"We shall leave you two together," said Duorr softly.

"Nonsense." Mungh Fahz seemed irritated at the other's stupidity. "There is no need to kill the fool. In fact, it would be distinctly inadvisable."

Randall could see the girl's face drained of color, so that only the faintest blue tinge showed in the white skin. One-quarter Martian, he decided. And still the most beautiful girl he could remember having seen since the days when he was so young that all girls were beautiful.

Mungh Fahz turned out the red light. Randall was in the dark now, although the others could still see clearly. Then Mungh Fahz spoke. Randall moved ahead blindly, and the next thing he knew, something like a steel rod hit him in the chest, making him gasp for breath.

After that he wasn't quite sure what happened. Once or twice he could hear Mungh Fahz speak, giving directions to the Phobian, and later he was under the impression that he had heard the girl cry out. But most of his impressions came to him not through his sense of hearing, but through the senses of touch and pain. The Phobian moved as passionlessly as if it had been a robot, and with the same devastating results.

After fifteen minute, Randall no longer knew he was being hit. It was then that the Phobian suspended operations.

* * *

Randall awoke to find himself in the dark again. But he was not alone. A voice spoke soothingly.

"Drink this."

He felt liquid slopping over his chin.

"Give me some light," he muttered thickly.

"I'm sorry. I forgot you couldn't see."

The red light went on, and he perceived the girl standing beside him. She held out the cup, and he gulped down what was in it.

It didn't make him feel any better. He tried to get to his feet, and found that he couldn't. She was watching him, her face rather pale, and Randall wondered, as he had wondered before, what she was doing with this bunch.

"You'd better give it to them," she said.

He managed to laugh. "You may think it strange, but I was telling the truth. I never saw that map."

She was silent, and he had a long interval in which to stare at her. Her eyes were the only feature that were characteristically Martian. They were a deep purple, such as no Earth people had ever possessed. By this red light, they looked almost black.

Randall spoke as if to himself. "I wonder what they'll try after this."

"What do you mean?"

"They've tried beating me up, but that didn't work. Now they're letting you see what you can do, but that isn't going to work, either. I'm curious to know what they'll think up next."

She was flushing. "They didn't send me here. I came of my own accord. I—I thought you would need help."

"And they didn't object?"

"No. They've decided that they want you to stay alive for a while. They know where O'Brien landed on Tellus-B. They intend to retrace the trip that he made in discovering the mundite. That way they hope to make you betray yourself."

RANDALL'S face wrinkled. "Betray myself? I don't get it."

"They're sure that you know what was on the map. When you come across a scene or a landmark that's familiar to you, they expect you to give the fact away."

"I see. And what's to be your part in all this?"

She flushed again. "I'm just an innocent observer. I'm Duorr's secretary. I

have been for years."

"Since when has a crook needed a secretary?"

"He isn't a crook. He's a millionaire, and he's never accepted the fact that Mars has federated with the other planets. He believes in Mars First, and he has a plan to break Mars away from the other worlds."

Randall nodded. He had heard of the Mars First movement. It was not very popular, even among Martians, and if not for the wealth of a few of its supporters would have died out long before.

"Mungh Fahz, on the other hand, is not interested in politics," went on the girl. "He's simply a hired man. But he's been promised a bonus if he gets on the trail of that mundite, and he means to earn it."

"I still don't understand how a secretary comes to be mixed up in this."

"I was taken along because Duorr is one of those extremely busy men of affairs, and he has a hundred things to attend to while he's on this trip. Besides, he trusts me. He thinks I admire him."

Randall looked a question.

"I don't, but I keep that fact to myself. Mungh Fahz is a little uneasy about my presence, but he doesn't see what harm I can do, and for that matter, neither do I. That's why I'm allowed so much freedom of movement."

Randall was beginning to feel a little better. He looked into the girl's eyes. "You haven't told me your name."

"It's Marta S'un."

"I'm Sam Randall. Now that we know each other, maybe you can help me get an atom-pistol."

"I might. But you know that an atom-blast can't hurt a Phobian."

"All the same, a weapon might come in handy."

She hesitated. "I'll try to lay my hands on one. But now I'd better get back. Duorr probably has some work for me."

After she had gone, Randall slowly rose to his feet. From what he had learned, it was clearer than ever that Mungh Fahz would never let him go alive. But he wasn't afraid any longer. This was no longer an affair that concerned his safety

alone, and just as on the occasion when he had earned that medal, the moment he felt that other people's lives depended on him, his own life didn't count. He could look at things impersonally. Whatever mundite was, it was of sufficient importance for him to make sure that Duorr didn't lay his hands on it.

He didn't see the girl again for a long time. It was the Phobian that brought him food, and Randall, despite the beating he had received from its hands, was able to regard the creature calmly. No nerves, no really vital center, no vulnerability even to an atom-blast. He wondered what he would have to do to dispose of it.

Neither Duorr nor Mungh Fahz bothered to question him again. They must have decided that it would be useless. He didn't know how many days passed while he was in the narrow little room in a corner of the space-ship. But eventually, gravity began to increase again. They were approaching their destination.

He could feel the slight jar as the ship landed. The gravity was a little less than that of Earth, and the slight difference gave him an illusion of great strength. That illusion disappeared quickly when he saw Mungh Fahz. The latter was accompanied by the Phobian, who would be Randall's constant attendant on Tellus-B.

THREE was still a faint glow from the setting sun when he stepped out on land. The distant mountains were swathed in shadowy veils of fog, and for a moment Randall felt as if he were back on Earth again. He had seen this same landscape before, in California. The same white-clad peaks, the same tree-covered foothills, the same fleecy clouds drifting slowly before a gentle wind. Only the sun was different. It was colder, smaller, enfeebled by distance. But there was no chill in the planet's rich atmosphere.

As Randall stared about him, night fell. There was little infra-red in the air, and even the Martians found it difficult to see. Duorr switched on a lamp that shed the faintest of red glows. To the Martians it spread a circle of radiance about their camp. Randall himself was still prac-

tically in the dark.

He thought of the map O'Brien was supposed to have passed on to him, and chuckled. Mungh Fahz looked up sharply at the sound.

"You find something amusing?"

"It's a story about an Irishman. I started to tell it to the nervous gentleman who kidnaped me."

"You Earth people believe that you have a sense of humor," snapped Mungh Fahz. "You will learn that it does not pay to jest. What have you seen?"

"Nothing you'd be interested in—much."

Duorr had approached, in what to Randall was the dark. "You may not know that this is the place where O'Brien landed on the trip when he discovered the mundite."

"On the contrary, I know it even better than you do."

Duorr's eyes glittered. "You fool, you have given yourself away," he spat out. "You see, Mungh Fahz? He has studied the map. He recognizes the place."

"I've never seen the said map," retorted Randall blandly.

There was hate in Duorr's eyes. Randall knew what was going on in the man's mind. To be so near his objective and yet so far, all because of the stubbornness of one man. Out of the darkness the Phobian approached, and Duorr looked an eager question at the leader of his hired thugs. Mungh Fahz shook his head.

"There'll be time for that later," he said. "Tonight we'll get a good night's rest. Tomorrow we'll attempt to retrace O'Brien's steps."

Randall went to sleep on the ground, on a carpet of soft springy, quill-like leaves that reminded him of pine needles, but were nothing of the sort. He was to learn the next day that they came not from trees, but from the grass. That night, however, he was uninterested in the flora and fauna of this strange imitation of Earth. He was more concerned with securing a good night's rest.

While it was still dark, however, he felt a sharp blow in his side, and awoke. An atom-pistol had fallen beside him. He

saw that the Martians had none of their infra-red lamps burning, and he hoped that the delivery of the pistol had gone unobserved, but he couldn't be sure. He thrust it under the shoulder of his shirt, where it made a not very noticeable bulge. His shirt was badly wrinkled and he knew that the slight lump near his shoulder-blade would go unobserved. Now if he could only figure out how to dispose of the Phobian.

He fell asleep on that thought. When he awoke again, the miniature sun had already risen. The Martians were up, and preparing to move.

They set out toward one of the mountains he had been staring at the previous evening. Now there was no mist hanging over them, and the peaks stood out very sharp and distinct. The nearest one must have been a great distance away, for an hour's walking did not bring it appreciably nearer.

AFTER a time, Marta S'un moved over toward Randall.

"Mind if I walk alongside you?" she asked.

"Not at all."

Mungh Fahz was too close by, and Randall deliberately lagged behind, so that he and the girl were soon alone—except for the Phobian, who hung on their trail with all the persistence of a single-minded robot.

"You needn't mind him," she said. "He's to prevent you from escaping, but he can't understand what we say."

"That thing isn't a 'he'; it's an 'it'."

"It doesn't matter. For all practical purposes, we're alone."

"Why?" he asked sharply. "Why doesn't Mungh Fahz mind if you talk to me?"

"Because he thinks he knows what I'll say. I'm supposed to be here—well, for the purpose you thought I had in mind when I first spoke to you."

Randall nodded. He still wasn't sure of her, although the atom-pistol had gone a long way toward convincing him. But he changed the subject with a certain abruptness.

"What is mundite?" he asked.

"It's a mineral discovered only on Tellus-B. It's supposed to be responsible for this planet's being here."

"I don't understand."

"Tellus-B is supposed to have come from far out in space by means of a hyperspatial short-cut. Some sort of explosion propelled it through other dimensions, so that it cut across a great many light-years of distance in a short time. Mundite is believed necessary for that explosion. Atomic disintegration is enough to set it off."

Randall's mind toyed with the thought. "And Duorr is interested in using mundite as an explosive?"

"That's it," she agreed. "A mundite explosion would put an atomic bomb to shame. It would blow an entire city out of this Universe as easily as you could disintegrate a copper coin."

"I gather that Duorr knows very little about mundite."

"Nobody knows very much. It was first discovered by a Martian, who didn't tell a great deal of what he had found before he departed on an unintended hyperspatial journey himself. As a matter of fact, some people believe the whole thing is a hoax."

"O'Brien didn't think so? He discovered a lode of the stuff?"

"No one knows how."

He stared at her. His expression, he knew, must have seemed unaccountable, for there was a puzzled expression on her face. Then she began to flush.

"Mungh Fahz is waiting for us. He's watching."

He glanced at the Martian brigand. "I suppose he wants to know how you're getting along. You may as well turn in an encouraging report."

He pulled her to him, and very deliberately kissed her. She pushed him away, but she was slow in doing so.

"That wasn't necessary."

"It will help convince Mungh Fahz when you tell him that I know where the mundite is, and that you are soon going to find out."

"You're bluffing."

"I'm telling the truth. Do you want me to offer Mungh Fahz some additional

evidence?"

She drew away hastily. "I don't like your idea of evidence. We'd better overtake the others."

That evening, when they made camp, there were intent expressions on the faces of Duorr and Mungh Fahz. Marta's report had evidently filled them with hope. Randall concealed a smile. They were going to get their information about mundite a little sooner than they expected.

HE WAITED until the others were ready to go to sleep. Duorr and Mungh Fahz conferred earnestly for some time after their men had turned in. Randall could hear them even after he could no longer see them in the infra-red darkness. The Phobian was somewhere near Randall, probably staring at him unwinkingly.

It was time to act—as soon as he knew exactly where that Phobian was. Randall stood up and threw a stone into the darkness. Mungh Fahz's voice rang out sharply.

"What's that?"

"I'm amusing myself. Do you mind?" challenged the Earthman.

"Yes. You'd better stop."

"I don't think so."

Mungh Fahz made a series of ululating sounds. It was his way of communicating with the Phobian. The next moment Randall heard the creature's footsteps approaching from the left.

He had wanted to make sure exactly where the Phobian was, and now he knew. He aimed his atom-pistol at a piece of dry wood that he had noticed previously on the ground, and hit a corner of it. The wood burst into flame.

By its light, he could see the Phobian twenty feet away, stalking him. He heard Mungh Fahz hiss. "He has an atom-pistol."

"He's a fool," returned Duorr. "It won't do him any good."

Randall threw a tiny pebble at the Phobian, and the latter automatically put up an arm to ward off the missile. A beam lanced out from Randall's weapon. There was the sound of an extremely weak explosion, and then—nothing. The Pho-

bian just wasn't there any more.

There was no smoke, no flame, no vapor of disintegration. The Phobian had simply disappeared, traveling to its death across unimaginable hyper-space, to end up finally in a universe thousands of light-years away.

Then Randall fell flat as two atom-beams lanced out at him from the startled Martians. He had chosen his position in advance, and the rays spent their strength uselessly on the heavy rock in front of him. The piece of dry wood was flaming brightly now, and he knew that the glare was none too good for Martian eyes. He risked putting an arm over the rock, and fired rapidly. He heard a scream from Duorr, and then a hoarse cry from Mungh Fahz.

"Don't shoot! I give up!"

"Walk toward the flame," ordered Randall curtly.

Mungh Fahz stepped forward, with his hands in the air, blinking painfully.

Randall came up in back of the man, ran a quick hand over his clothes. Then he heard a noise behind him, and dropped to the ground again.

"If you value your life, you'd better tell your men to surrender."

But it was none of Mungh Fahz's men. It was Marta.

"Where's Duorr?" she asked quickly.

"I think he's dead. You might take a look."

She ran over to the place where the Martian was lying. A second later he heard her voice again. "He hasn't . . . he hasn't got any. . . ."

She couldn't finish. Randall had aimed for the head, and he knew that a Martian without a head was not exactly a pleasant sight.

He tossed her the atom-pistol Mungh Fahz had been using. "Keep him covered while I round up the rest."

"All right."

He hesitated only for a second after he had left her. He could hear Mungh Fahz start to speak in a low voice, using some Martian dialect, and then shut up abruptly. A beam from the girl's atom-pistol had trimmed the bandit's hair, leaving the ends neatly singed. Randall went

about his task of rounding up the remaining members of Mungh Fahz's crew without looking back to check up on Marta's ability to keep their leader under control.

He found, to his surprise, that none of the crew was awake. Martians slept soundly, as a rule, and these thugs were no exception. He was able to disarm them very peacefully.

AFTERWARD he bound Mungh Fahz himself, hog-tying the bandit leader so neatly that the girl gazed in admiration at the job he had done. Mungh Fahz was no light weight, but knowing that the bandit's own men would have the job of carrying him back to the space ship, Randall didn't worry about that.

"It's time you got some sleep," he told Marta then. "I'll stay on guard."

"I'm not sleepy. And I'd like to know how you found the mundite."

"You mean that pebble I threw at the Phobian?"

She nodded. "You hadn't even heard of it before you came here. How did you recognize it?"

Hog-tied as he was, Mungh Fahz was listening.

"I think," said Randall, "that explanations had better wait till tomorrow. Just in case our bandit friend should get ideas. And I still think you had better get some sleep."

This time, somewhat to Randall's regret, she agreed. Randall stayed up alone, from time to time heaping more wood on the flame his atom-gun had kindled. By the time the first streaks of dawn were brightening the sky he had difficulty keeping his eyes open, but he noted with interest that Mungh Fahz was tied as securely as before, and somewhat more uncomfortably. He had been making futile efforts to escape, and had succeeded only in almost choking himself.

At Randall's order Mungh Fahz' own men carried him back to the space ship. There were a couple of bandits on board, but after they watched Randall make a small grove of trees disappear with the aid of a pebble of mundite and an atom-gun, they were more than anxious to surrender. The Earthman stowed his pris-

oners, including Mungh Fahz, away in a pair of small rooms in the rear of the ship.

"You won't even breathe the same air we do," Randall told them. "Your part of the ship is hermetically sealed off from mine. In case you manage to start trouble I can blast you all across hyperspace without inconveniencing myself—and it will be a pleasure to do it. So you'd better be good."

He was exaggerating somewhat, he knew, when he claimed that a mundite blast wouldn't inconvenience him, but Mungh Fahz was hardly in a position to call his bluff. Randall settled down to a long and peaceful voyage back to Earth, where he could turn his prisoners over to authorities who would be pleased to take care of them.

They had hardly left Tellus-B when Marta S'un resumed her questioning of the previous night.

"How did you recognize the mundite?" she demanded, puzzled.

Randall smiled at her. "You've got Martian eyes, haven't you, Marta?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"You can see very well by infra-red. You can see even better by red light. In fact, your eyes are so sensitive to red light that they're easily dazzled by it. But on the whole, I don't think they're better or worse than my own. They're simply sensitive to a different range of wavelengths."

She frowned. "You mean that you can see colors that I can't?"

"Exactly. I can perceive violet, which is invisible to you. Ordinarily, that leaves you with the advantage, because in the so-called dark, infra-red light is common, whereas violet light is rare. You can see where everything is dark to me, and I can't see at all where it's dark to you."

"However, there are exceptions. Whenever you run across mundite, you'll find

one of those exceptions. The stuff happens to have a violet phosphorescence."

"But Duorr and Mungh Fahz could have used their instruments—"

"They didn't realize the possibility. The first man to discover mundite was a Martian, and before he could learn of the violet glow, he was killed. Then along came O'Brien. He just happened to stay on Tellus-B overnight in the dark, in what I imagine is the one region where mundite is abundant. The violet glow hit him in the eyes. The discovery was as easy as that."

"O'Brien knew that no Martian could see what he himself had seen. And he wasn't afraid of the secret in the hands of an Earthman. That's why he didn't need a map. He simply drew glowing violet arrows pointing to the hills where the mundite deposits were richest, and added a few simple instructions. He scratched these arrows across several rocks with mundite pebbles. I saw them the night we landed. Naturally, Duorr and Mungh Fahz, who couldn't see them, had their suspicions of me confirmed when I told them I knew O'Brien had been there."

"So that's it. And I used to be contemptuous of people with Earth eyes."

"Have you realized," asked Randall irrelevantly, "that your late employer is deceased, and that you are out of a job, with no chance of getting a reference for the next one?"

"No, I haven't."

"In your place, there's just one thing a girl could do. That is, if there was somebody like me around, somebody who was crazy about her and wanted to marry her. I mean, you—"

"This," she complained, "is getting to be confusing."

"I can make it clear by kissing her—I mean, you," said Randall.

And he did.

PIRATES OF THE TIME TRAIL, a Complete Book-Length Novel of a
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A Department Conducted by SERGEANT SATURN

WELL, what do you know—another of the ardent admirers of Sergeant Saturn has busted loose with the artwork and has given out with a portrait sketch of the old space dog. (You may remember the one that appeared in STAR-TLING STORIES in the Ether Vibrates some months ago.) So, up comes Augustine Galiano of Freeport, Texas, with a space-port holiday photograft of your senior astrogator.

The only comment with the picture from Augustine was—"Here is your just reward for all that "Xeno" chatter. Lovingly (I shouldn't have said that, but what's the diff? I use bad English anyhoo!) yours." You will find Augustine's contribution to the spatial rogues' gallery on the next page.

Before we cut the draw-string and spill all the little fumaroles out of the mail sack, let's take note of a word from S. Mason of 1617 N. Philip St., Philadelphia, Pa. Kiwi S is organizing a new SFL chapter, and all SFL members within sharpshooting distance of the City of Brotherly Love are invited to get in touch with Pee-lot Mason and take a few pot shots at scientific things in general.

And here is further word from Kiwi Conrad Fisher about that international language business mentioned last issue. Kiwi Fisher did not mean Ro; he meant Esperanto. And any of you junior astrogators who want to learn spatial double talk just communicate with Conrad at 229 East Spring St., Titusville, Pa.

On the beam, Frog-eyes. Spill out the ethergrams and billet-doux—or should I say belles-lettres?—and let's see what is stewing. We will begin with a few stragglers who comment on the June issue.

FROM JUNE TO JANUARY

By Bob Parker

Dear Sarge: Sarge, you are going to die of astonishment, you shall faint with surprise, you will choke on the unexpected but even so Sarge, I gotta say it. The June issue of T.W.S. was the best since the January issue of 1938! And it's even better than that! Sarge, why don't you put out an issue like this every time?

But enough congratulations, salutations, exclamations, and commendations. Let's get into the ratings. The E.O.B.S.F. (Exponents of Better Science-Fiction), met last night with the following results. Out of 50 stories rated, covers compared, and features rated, T.W.S. stood as follows (12 magus rated):

Through the Blackboard—3rd. (One swell story.)
Wobbles on the Moon—47th. (Get rid of Lang, please!)

The Devil's Fiddle—2nd. (Recall reading a few years ago an article on Paganini and wondered at

the time if anyone had written a story around him.)

Children of the Gods—1st. This story is one of the most beautiful pieces of writing it has ever been my pleasure to read. It ranks with Merritt's "Moon Pool," "Burn, Witch, Burn," and other great stories. A true classic.

Grief of Bagdad—8th. Kent comes through with another swell story.

Two-Timing Man—21st. Pretty good for an amateur story.

The Golden Temple—36th. (Now I get on my favorite theme, the defense of Ray Cummings. I noticed in the present issue of T.W.S. three or four letters all kicking Ray. Well, Mace, Kinkade, and Belach, I've never seen any of your perfect work in T.W.S.! Or do you boys feel that you just shouldn't write anything good about Ray, no one else does, and you're afraid to go out on the limb. Well, I'm not, as I believe Ray is one of three great living S.F. writers. I must say though, that "The Golden Temple" was not within a billion light years of what Ray usually writes.)

World of the Living Dead—17th. Darn good, it's funny how Carver and Rogers both used this type of dimensional theme, yet both were good. Mental telepathy, I betcha!

Features—5th out of 12

Cover—7th. Come on, Sarge, with Bergey a rest.

Inside Illustrations—6th. And would have been lower but for Finlay's neat illustration. As regarding the illustration for "Through the Blackboard," I didn't know dress material was that scarce!

Yes, Sarge, a darn good issue, one you can be proud of. I got my gripes, though. Why don't you get someone besides Marchioni for inside pics. Finlay is your best asset.

As time is short, I blast off now. Will soon send an Amateur Story your way. I see Raymond Washington got Honorable Mention. Nice going, Ray!—Box 159, Stanhope, Iowa.

Okay, Pee-lot Parker; a nice letter. No comment. There's another letter coming up with more dope about CHILDREN OF THE GODS. Blast on.

INFORMATION WHILE YOU WAIT

By Gene Hunter

Dear space-warp: Take it from me, you are going to have the unholy wrath of all of fandom about your ears for printing a yarn that held absolutely no element of science, but was pure, unadulterated fantasy. I'm speaking of N. R. de Meh-be-co's THE DEVIL'S FIDDLE. Let me say that it was one of the best pieces of fantasy I've read, despite the fact that it did not belong in T.W.S. I rate it in first place, with four units, designating it as a near-classic.

Oddly enough, another fantasy, or nearly so, gets second spot on this month's (non)hit parade, because THROUGH THE BLACKBOARD managed to pull into this position with 2.5 units. (Note: my new rating system works thusly—5 units classic, 4 units near-classic, 3 units enjoyable—better-than-average, 2 units fair—good reading at the time, but not particularly memorable, 1 unit designates a story as poor but readable; this case usually being one that has a good theme, but has been done hundreds of times before, and zero units—well, Ray Cummings usually lands here, so gather your own conclusions.)

GRIEF OF BAGDAD, THE TWO-TIMING MAN, and WORLD OF THE LIVING DEAD stagger in the not-so-coveted third place with two units, the latter despite the fact that the same theme was

used in H. G. Wells' THE NEW ACCELERATOR which appeared in April of 1926, in *Peculiar Fables* (thank to Mr. Mebane), the first stf (all-stf, that is) mag printed, and has appeared at frequent intervals ever since.

ray cummings (the non-use of capital letters on Hackie's name is intentional, as you may know) manages to climb up to 1 unit for THE GOLDEN TEMPLE. How long did it take you to write this, ray? 2 hours?

WOBBLES OF THE MOON and CHILDREN OF THE GODS tie for the bottom rung with 0.0 apiece. Cover seems better than when I first saw it, so reluctantly give it 2 units. Article is interesting and gets three units, while the interior pics manage to average up to 1.76. By the way, Sarge, could you tell me who drew the pic for TWO-TIMING MAN? I need this information badly for my files. Could it have been Morey? By the way, average for June is 1.9. I'd like to stretch a point and make it 2, but this wouldn't be fair, now, would it?

THE READER SPEAKS was quite interesting this time: the best it has been for several months. Marty Huebner is slightly off the beam concerning the issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES he seeks information on. Turning to my card file, I find that THE IMMORTALITY SEEKERS which he mentions was written by John W. Campbell, Jr., was a Penton and Blake novelette, and appeared in the October, 1937, issue of T.W.S., not S.W.S., as brother Huebner supposes. Going now to my looseleaf file for a cross index, I have found some more data on the issue, so here it is, as Kiwi H. requests.

Cover is very neat, showing several Earthmen fleeing to their space-ship, while a semi-BEM pursues them, lapping up one of the party with a long, tentacle-like, tongue. (Would like to know who painted it—perhaps the Sarge can tell me now that he knows the date of the issue.) Stories were: THE HOT HOUSE PLANET, by Arthur K. Barnes, the Campbell yarn, THE CAVERN OF THE SHINING POOL, by Arthur Leo Zagat, A COMET PASSES, by Eando Binder, THE SPACE-SIZE-TIME MACHINE, by Ray Cummings (capitals this time because this Tubbyette was good), HOLMES' FOLLY by Edmond Hamilton, VIA ETHERLINE, by Gordon A. Giles, and WHEN THE EARTH LIVED, by Henry Kuttner. What a line-up—not a

single story was rated as poor. Incidentally, I haven't listed them in order of merit, but in the order they are listed on the contents page. Also featured were LF—, a picture feature by Jack Binder, which should be returned by all means, and unless I'm badly mistaken, the last episode of ZARNAK ever to appear. Only familiar figures in THE READER SPEAKS were Robt. A. Madle and John Giunta. That covers it pretty well, I think. You're welcome, Pee-lot Huebner.

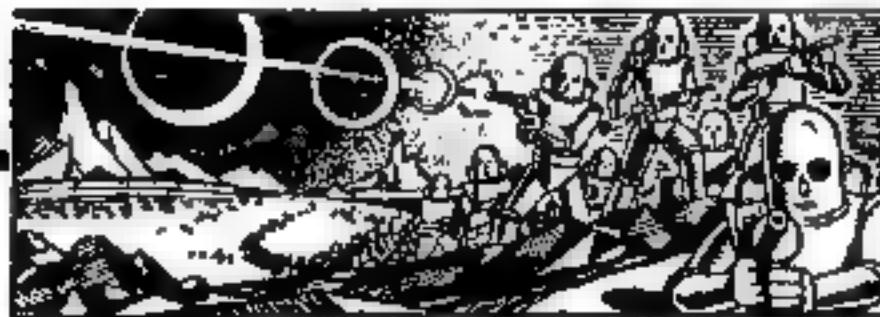
Jumping across time from '37 to '48, we return once more to the dim recesses of the current reader's dept. Mace is good, per usual. KinKade rather opinionated but good, and then there was a short note by Byron Kelham of Portland. Portland—let's see, that name sounds familiar . . . oh yes, I live there now, don't I?

I, Brother K., would like to contact an avid fan (and this goes for any other fans, authors, or artists in the Portland area), call in person any evening or Sunday afternoon—I'm usually home, or call Broadway 0856 any time after six P.M. on week days, or Saturday and Sunday afternoons. I'm very particular about whom I pal around with, however. You must not be under two and a half or over 221, preferably an Earthling, but Martians and Vestans will be considered.

Continuing, Ebey is not up to par this time. Mebane must have the solution to the aforementioned's age in one of his four possibilities. If Kiwi Ebey is really eleven years old, he certainly doesn't write like it. PROCLAMATION: Be it known that if in the future, I, Gene Hunter, being of sound mind . . . being of sound body, ever refer to a story as belonging to the eleven or twelve year old level, one George Ebey of 4768 Reinhardt Drive, Oakland, California, is hereby for all time, ever more, world-without-end, excluded.

The Sarge seems to be wondering if we junior astrogators (as he refers to us) are getting out of hand because we begin a sudden drive for trimmed edges, when he didn't even mention the subject. Well, Friend Saturn, 'tis this way—you've suggested so many things, the annual, for one thing, and then failed to live up to any of the suggestions, although we raved our heads off for most of them, that we become disgusted. We become rebellious. We be-

[Turn page]



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gin to do an amazing thing. We think for ourselves, believe it or not! Hence, the sudden drive for T.E.

For heaven's sake, don't begin spouting in "Ro," Sarge. It's hard enough to understand you as it is.—*N.W. Irving, Portland, Ore.*

Why should the old Sarge take up a lot more space to spout off here? Wilbur Thomas did the illustration for TWO-TIMING MAN, Kiwi Hunter. Offhand, I can't remember who did the October, 1937, cover. Probably Belarski.

Here's a flash from a gal reader.

BOND IS FAVORITE

By Flora Johns

Dear Sarge: The June issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES was very good. It is the second issue I have read, but you've got another fan for your magazine. I started on the April issue. What started me was the name of the author of the lead story. Bond has always been one of my favorite authors, so I couldn't resist the temptation of buying the magazine.

The June issue as I said before was very good, although one of the stories wasn't quite as good as I expected. The story I mean is "Through the Blackboard." I rate it second best in the issue.

The best, undoubtedly was "The Devil's Fiddle." Maybe it's because the author knows about the subject of the story, a violin, and doesn't have to worry about putting in some very bad error. "Children of the Gods" and "Two-timing Man" tie for third place.

"World of Living Dead" wasn't too good, but it was better than the other two although I didn't particularly care for it. "The Golden Temple" and "Grief of Bagdad" could very easily have been left out, and the magazine would not have suffered any for the omission.

I can hardly wait for the next issue. It sounds good.—*146-32 225th St., Springfield Gardens, N. Y.*

There will be more stories by Nelson S. Bond, as we rocket along, Kiwi Flora. Sorry you didn't care for the Tubby and Pete Manx stories. Both characters are usually pretty good. Maybe you'll like the next ones. Here comes another blast from a space-daze who likes Pete Manx.

APOLOGIES TO ALL

By W. S. Burgeson

"Immortal Sergeant": Greetings, Ipswich! It's Burgeson back again. The guy that took the "Fiddle" out of "Infidelity"; and ended up with apoplexy! Today, dear Xeno Reservoir, I'm full of cheer! Said cheer being composed of 1/2 wine, 1/3 rum, and 1/3 beer. Three-thirds make a whole; and I guess I'd better crawl in that "whole" and pull the ground over me. (Oh, come now! Was it really that bad?)

But as long as I'm the Goona that shells out the mazuma, the Flash with the cash, the Gay Blade with the jade, the Bo' with the dough, the Slob with the bob, the Goofy Stoopy with the Rupee; or, as they say in French: the Slight Snipe with the white, I'm entitled to have my say-so! Right? Right! So without further ado; let's dip our begrimed fingers into the steamin', scintillatin', eye-pleasin' cauldron of classy cookery that good old T.W.S. has whipped up for this isth. (and maybe I do mean "ish"!) But enough of this'. Let's throw the swill to the pigs; (no relation to Hitler) and get on with the ding-dong distribution of roses and stinkweed!

Thru The Blackboard was a pretty good yarn. Witty, solid, and with a little useful information for those who care to look for it. Two roses!

Children of The Gods: A masterpiece of sheer, boring idiocy. An extremely dull tale wherein the author soars to breath-taking heights in the realm of paper-wasting, imbecilic gibberings! Very dull, Mr. Sharp! Strictly stinkweed! Wobbles on the Moon: Another of those "Carstairs" yarns. Not bad; but not good! $\frac{1}{2}$ of a rose.

The Devil's Fiddle: A De Mexico story! 'Nough said! Four roses.

Grief of Bagdad: All those other Space-Fliers can harp themselves blue in the face for all I care. I think Pete Manx stories are the nuts; and want to see more of them in the future. Two roses.

Two-Timing Man: An amateur that should go places.

The Golden Temple: Frankly, Mr. C., that yarn is almost as corny as that sickly letter of mine which Saturn published. $\frac{1}{2}$ rose.

World of Living Dead: "Long Live King Saturn!" worth one rose. (Go ahead, Saturn, hit me.) Cover and Ills; are worth one rose.

Now, unhappy day, we turn to The Reader Speaks.

Sergeant, you cute little fugitive from a broken down Interplanetary garbage scow, you printed that first letter I sent you. For that deed; I'd like to put turpentine in your Xeno and sugar in your auto's gas tank.* After looking that anaemic attempt at wit over; I must admit that it was awful! That piece of mouldy wit will undoubtedly draw the wrath of Stay, Inc.!

Correction: It was Fractional "Wit"; not "Unit"! Fraction being one-half, making you a . . . Yeah! Then you pour salt in the wound by calling me a "Private." I don't even rate a "Kiwi." If brains were transportation, mine rotund (?) host, thou wouldest have flat feet from walking. And put that jug down! That "meat wagon" sounds as tho' I was trying to mimic Ebey—choke, sputter, gape line. Aye, Warren, the wrath of many will fall upon thine innocent pate.

Please extend my apologies to all. Now I guess I'll hie it for the nearest Happy House and beat my head against the wall. I didn't miss the cute (?) little way you called me a dunce. Pretty good—*2300 16th Ave., So., Minneapolis, Minn.*

(*Ask your Garage man.)

Take it easy, Kiwi Burgeson. It's just the space sickness. You'll feel all right after you've made two or three trips in this astro-gation chamber. And don't beat your head against the wall. You might dent something.

HOST STORIES

By Joe Lawson

Sarge, how could you! Ghost stories for Gossakes! How in Klono's brazen claws (great guy that Smith) did "The Devil's Fiddle" sneak into what I fondly call a SF mag?

By the way, you are now in second place among the mags. Not, I regret to say, because you've improved but because some others have fallen so low.

Really, Sarge ol' Boy, the mag is terrible this issue. You're way below par. The ratings as follow are:

Thru The Blackboard; So the little professor drew a line, wished and Presto!—he was in the 4th dimension, huh? Bla-a-gh!! Fairly well written, though. Call it C+.

Wobbles in The Moon; Ye Gods, man! Have I up and bought a detective magazine by mistake?

Children of The Gods; The idea's old, the writing is too melodramatic and the ending is poor. If it wasn't for the fact that women now read SF I would drop these vague generalities and tell you what I really thought of it. F—.

Grief of Bagdad; Not bad. Corny, but O.K. B.

Two-Timing Man; Pretty good for a beginner. More from her. B—.

The Golden Temple; Well, I'll be darned! R.C.'s getting back in the groove! Let's hope it's for good. Not bad at all. B+.

World of Living Dead; Ho-hum. The same old story. —D.

The Devil's Fiddle: Bra-a-a-ack! Z+.

Cover; Bergey as usual is good, but, Great Jehovah!, a B E M to end all B E M's (happy thought!) If this goes on, sirrah, I shall be forced to punish you terribly indeed! I, sirrah, shall revive the—tremble, oh Sarge, tremble—the S F T P O B E M O T C O S F P ! Do you realize what that will do?

About Marty Huebner's letter. The issue he refers to is that of Oct. '37. The "Tubby" story was "The Space-Time-Size Machine" and the only story with "ether" in the title is "Via Etherline" by Gordon A. Giles (or the guy that turned out to be Eando Binder with a beard.) He probably means "The Cavern of The Shining Pool" by Zagat. But where, Marty (if I may be so bold, tee-hee-hee) do you

get that "Science-Wonder" storiem. The mag hasn't been called that since around '31.

By the way, Sarge, I'm only 14 years old and this is my very—aw, nuts! You know the rest—2306 So. Floweron, Los Angeles, Calif.

How many times do I have to tell you dizzy space-birds that THRILLING WONDER STORIES and its two companion magazines are climbing out of the rut? In the first place, what is your definition of science-fiction? And if the old space dog could get ten percent of you monkeys to agree, how many of that ten percent would want every story every issue to fit that exact pattern? Oh, well, let it lay. Comes now a fresh outbreak from your same sunny state. Andy liked THE DEVIL'S FIDDLE.

PRSXON—A HE-MAN DRINK

By Andy Anderson

Dear Droopanoot: Before I start in on my little dissertation on your June number, I want you to get one fact straight. I'm not going to have you calling me kiwi (or any other names either) and if you do, you're going to find yourself stationed out in the sticks, doing patrol work around Pluto, or something. And I can do it, too, 'cause you happen to be a subordinate of mine, see? I'm known by a couple of other names, too, but that shouldn't concern you. Casual acquaintances know me as Asteroid Anderson, but my good friends just call me Aimless.

My grading system is based on Prxon (a real he-man's drink for you, nothing like that cheap Xeno you drink, Sarge), from five jugs down to one. For grades requiring infinitesimal fractions of a jug of Prxon I use jugs of Xeno (a jug of Xeno equals about one-millionth of a swig of Prxon).

Cover: I almost didn't buy the magazine on account of it. My Lord, Bergey, you had a masterpiece last issue. Why don't you do it again? Impossible to rate this one.

"Through the Blackboard": Plot none too new, but well done. It gets 3 jugs of Prxon. Of the two illustrations, the first was by far the best. Second drags art rating down to 2 jugs.

P. S. Sort of a Lewis Carroll title, don't you think?

"Wobbles in the Moon": Good detective story with added sciencefiction angle. I liked it. Give Long 3½ jugs and Marchioni, oh, say—2.

"The Devil's Fiddle": The best story in the ish by far. It wasn't quite a classic, so give it 4½ jugs. I give a 5 to about one story in a thousand. Art rates 2½ jugs. Is Marchioni the only artist you've got?

"Children of the Gods": Average story, worth reading. Give both Sharp and Marchioni 2½.

"Grief of Bagdad": Peter Manx is a good character, but the story wasn't none too hot. It also manages 2½. Where did the title come from? Art deserves 2 jugs. A hint to Morey: Try detailing your backgrounds more, like Paul does.

"Two-Timing Man": I just didn't care for it. No particular reason. My rating is 1½ jugs of Jovian red eye. Art wheedles out a 2.

"The Golden Temple": Story is a 3½ one. A good ending, but rather easy to get early in the story. Cummings could have done better with it. Finlay would get a 4, except for one thing. According to Cummings, Parks wore a headgear with wires running down to belt, wristlets and anklets. Finlay had him gliding thru the viewplate. Because of this, I'm giving Finlay only 3 jugs.

"World of Living Dead"—Old, old plot. I toss it 1½ jugs. Marchioni gets 3.

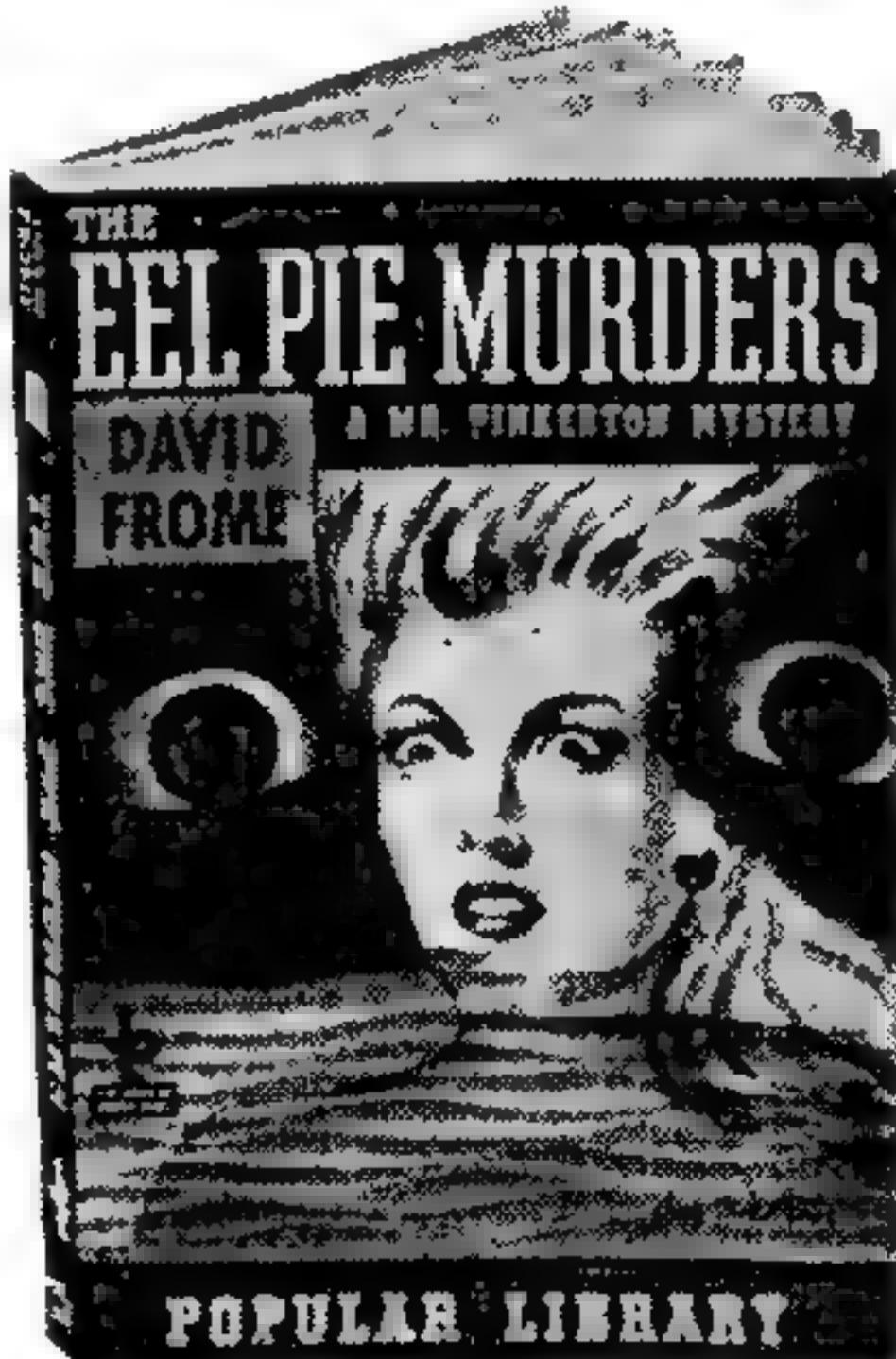
"The Reader Speaks"—one of the best letters to the editor I've ever seen.

In general, the June ish wasn't either too bad or too good. Exception was "The Devil's Fiddle." Suggested improvements: Art—Paul, more Finlay, Bok (or is he in the army?). Covers by Bergey if he does them like last time hereafter. As to trimmed edges, well, I'm for them if the publishers think they can afford to and still not let down any in fiction and art.—P. O. Box 633, Pismo Beach, Calif.

Okay, Kiwi Anderson, assign me to the
[Turn page]

Mystery Fans!

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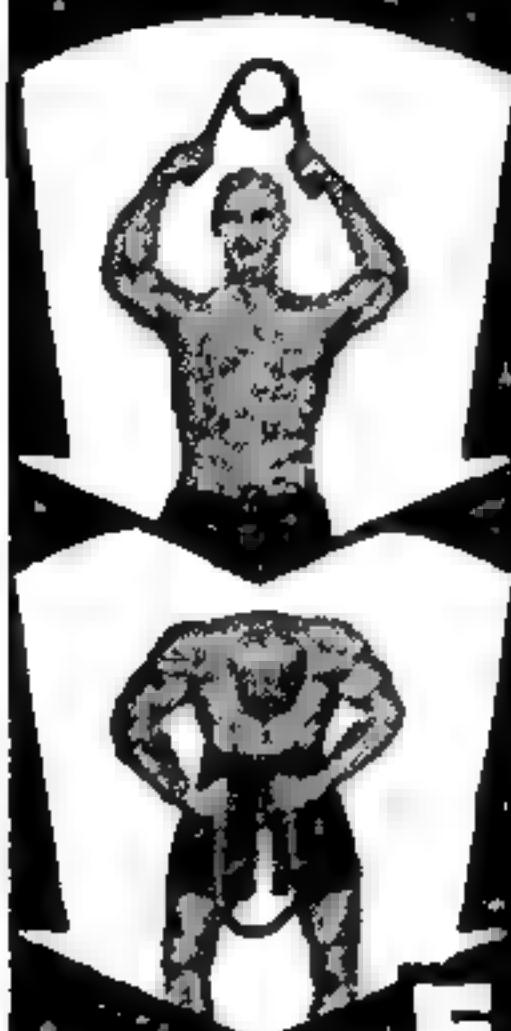
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Pluto detail. But remember that you are riding in this craft with me. And Pluto is where the old Sarge gets his Xeno. I never heard of this Praxion of yours. A cheap imitation on the order of Jamaica ginger, I have no doubt. You ask about story titles, and your questions are needless; you get the idea quick enough. Now, get to polishing up the chromium fittings while we hear from another gal pee-lot.

NO KICK ON DEPARTMENT

By Julia Ruth Banta

Dear Sarge: In the June issue you asked for letters from gal pee-lots so here 'tis. This is the first letter of this sort I have ever written so please make allowances with that in mind.

I'm sixteen years old and I've been reading science-fiction for about eight of those sixteen years. Most of my friends think I'm crazy but I tell them it runs in the family. My father reads science-fiction and I got hold of my first book in that manner.

Well, that's enough of my history, now let's talk about T.W.S. Your Mag. on the whole is very good. Your art work is putrid, but then what science-fiction Mag.'s art work is anything but putrid. So far as rough edges are concerned it doesn't make me any difference whether they are rough or smooth: what's inside is what counts.

What shall I talk about next? Oh, yes! No letter is complete without rating the stories so here goes: I'll rate the stories from a feminine viewpoint and we will see how they compare with the boys.

"The Devil's Fiddle" takes first place (I couldn't put the book down until I finished it.)

"Through the Blackboard" takes second, with "Children of the Gods" coming in a close third.

"World of the Living Dead" is fourth.

"Grief of Bagdad" fifth.

The other three stories I won't bother to rate, but I will comment on them.

"Wobblies on the Moon" was a very poor detective story and I don't like detective stories.

"Two-timing Man" was a mess. The author tried to combine science-fiction and love and did a poor job of it.

"The Golden Temple" just wasn't enough. It had me up in the air expecting more and it let me down with a thump.

I always read "The Reader Speaks" first thing and I think it is swell. Keep up the good work and I won't kick.—Sullivan, Mo.

Listen, honey chile, you need never make any apologies for reading science-fiction. The old Sarge has a pair of daughters older than you, and both of them read science-fiction—and like it. So we'll all be crazy together. As for detective stories in the science field, there is a new series coming up in either THRILLING WONDER or STARTLING by Owen Fox Jerome who is an old-time detective-story favorite and a nut on scientification. Maybe you'll like these stories better than you think. The old Sarge will tell you more about this series as soon as it is scheduled. And John Carrstairs, the botanical detective hero of WOBBLIES ON THE MOON, is coming soon in a complete book length novel in STARTLING STORIES which will probably surprise you.

Let's make way right quick for a very tardy passenger. Here is a report on our April issue—if anybody remembers that far back.

TWO FOR APRIL

By Dick Dolan

Dear Sarge: Take your feet off your desk and let's get down to the April issue.

A lot of others may complain about the covers, but this one left me speechless.

It looks as though Bergey just tossed the nearest paint he could find in hopes of obtaining something of a better quality than usual.

As before he failed.

My ratings are:

No. 1—Pawns of Chaos

No. 2—Heavy Man.

No use of talking about the rest.

Let the other readers complain, but you keep in there pitching, Sarge.—*18 Circle Drive, Sheridan Circle, Chicopee Falls, Mass.*

You almost missed the boat, Pee-lot Dolan, so don't get fresh with Bergey, or the old Sarge will put you at work whitewashing the inside walls of the rocket chambers. Here we are spacing with the November issue, and you are chatting about April. What do you think of the present cargo?

JUNE LUCK

By Hugh Hinchliffe

Dear Sarge: What luck, what luck, WHAT LUCK two days ago I picked up my copy of T.W.S. as usual and in it I found the best story your mag. or any other SF had ever published, yes sir, the best. What could the story be but "The Devil's Fiddle," by N. R. de Mexico.

I have been reading S.F. for a good long time but I have always said that I could not write to any Mag. until I found the best story I had ever read. "The Devil's Fiddle" sure fills the bill.

Before I wrote this letter I took into consideration every good story I have read in the last 5 years from the 4 leading S.F. Mags., of which T.W.S. is one. So you can see that I gave this story a lot of thought.

Now for the rest of the mag. (10 point system.)

STORY	PICS	
THROUGH THE BLACKBOARD.....	3	1 1/2
5 1/2 (too short)		
CHILDREN OF THE GODS	3	
6 (good yarn)		
WOBBLES IN THE MOON.....	2	
2 (terrible)		
THE DEVIL'S FIDDLE.....	6 1/2	
10+		
GRIEF OF BAGDAD.....	2	
4 (poor)		
TWO-TIMING MAN	6 1/2	
7 (very good)		
THE GOLDEN TEMPLE.....	3	
5 (fair)		
WORLD OF THE LIVING DEAD	2	
7 (very good)		
ARTICLES—all good		
Cover—4		

Give us more yarns like THE DEVIL'S FIDDLE.—*415 Plymouth Rd., West Palm Beach, Fla.*

I'm sure Senor de Mexico will be flattered, Kiwi Hinchliffe, that you especially liked THE DEVIL'S FIDDLE. But what are you going to do when you read another best story in THRILLING WONDER STORIES? Never mind figuring your way out of this cul de sac; just write in whenever you run across a tale that excites your admiration. You should like THE LOTOS

[Turn page]



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EATERS in the August issue—and DAY-MARE in this number. In fact, as the old space dog looks ahead, it seems to him that all you kiwis have plenty of good things in prospect for the next six issues.

THE READER SQUEAKS

By Marty C. Seligson

Dear Sarge: I wonder if you are broad-minded enough to print this letter? For your sake, I hope so.

Readers write to you to criticize parts of your magazine, the cover, the stories, the drawings, but I want to criticize another part, "The Reader Speaks."

Look at any one of the Reader's pages in any one of your issues. Why, to read those letters, you would think Science Fiction fans were a bunch of grammar-school nit-wits. First of all, look at Joe Blow, the oh so very clever and wise coachee who knows everything there is to be known about SF. He is easy to tell because he starts his letter with something like this—"Here I am again, boys; O.K., let's blast off."

This occupies his first paragraph. If you look at his second paragraph, about the third line you will see in big type the word XENO. As far as that word goes—well, "trite" describes it pretty well. Another way to tell him apart from the others is by his abbreviations, he will never use anything but T.W.S. for THRILLING WONDER STORIES. He won't write out the title of a magazine, too old-fashioned. He will use mag for magazine, Ish for issue and Ed for editor. He will be the same guy every month. He has nothing to say and takes a page to say it in.

Next, there is John Smith, who writes—"Dear Sarge: I think your magazine is wonderful—the best out. Here is the way to rate the stories: 1—2—3—4—5. Thank you."

What can you say about something like that? It must be apparent to you that the only reason both these people write is to show other people their names in print. I am not blaming you, but your readers. How about it, Readers? The sales show the editor whether or not you like his magazine. If you have something to say, say it; if not shut the (censored) up.—410 Huntley Road, Woodmere, L. I., N. Y.

Pee-lot Seligson, it isn't how broad-minded the old Sarge is—it's how fast can you run. Some of these readers you're talking about are pretty good sharpshooters. And you've just taken a couple of pot shots at them. I'll hold your coat.

Here is word from a new kiwi in one of Uncle Sam's Anti-aircraft Artillery schools.

APOLOGIES TO SCIENCE FICTION

By Candidate John Plumb

Dear Sarge: I am writing to offer you my sincere apologies for years of derogatory remarks uttered against publications like THRILLING WONDER STORIES. I am glad to admit my error. Frankly I thought the only people who read Science Fiction magazines were escapees or people with an exceptionally low IQ. I have been forced to alter this opinion drastically, however.

I am an Anti-aircraft Officer Candidate here at Camp Davis, and I don't need to tell you that the United States Army puts its potential officers through an extremely stiff routine, mentally, and physically. Therefore, on Sundays I try to rest both mind and body for the next week. Last Sunday I was meandering around the PX, looking for something to read, when my eyes fell on a gaudy cover depicting a brightly burning spaceship plunging between two huge suns toward a green planet, and advertising in large blue letters THRILLING WONDER STORIES.

On an impulse I bought it and thus provided myself with the most fascinating three hours I have ever spent. I found myself billions of miles away darting through space in sleek cruisers, or discovering for the first time great, mysterious worlds where danger lurked on every side. I really got a terrific kick out of it. You've got something, Sarge.

Science Fiction is the literature of tomorrow. Everything moves in cycles, and literature is no exception. The romanticism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has long ago passed away

before the crushing legions of realism. Steinbeck and Hemingway are the order of the day and will be for some time to come. A new romanticism has sprung up, however. Based on scientific or semi-scientific facts and ideas, it will have more to stand on than the old romanticism. Even after a quarter of a century of development it is still in its robust youth and must be advertised by loud covers and huge letters, but sooner or later it will reach maturity; maybe in five years, maybe not for a century, but eventually, yes.

You are on the ground floor. Science Fiction is doing a valuable service in keeping alive the spirit of adventure in men. Man cannot become static or he will perish, and as long as he has the vast, comparatively unknown stretches of interstellar space before him, this can never happen. What mighty sagas of adventure, exploration and sudden death will some day take place out here. You are trying to tell us in *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*.

I realize that this is not the type of letter usually found in your section, but I haven't as yet read enough Science Fiction to feel justified in criticizing the stories.

About this Xeno. I shall try to have it sold in all PXs. I suppose the ingredients come from the fifth planet of Vega's system, however—in which case we'll forget it.

Good luck from a new follower of S.F. and T.W.S. in particular.—Camp Davis, N. C.

Neatly said, Pee-lot Plumb, and you supply a type of ethergram that Kiwi Seligson, just ahead of you, may be wanting to see. Anyway, the old Sarge wants to see letters like yours, and you are cordially welcomed to the astrogation chamber. The next voyage we make to Sirius you shall certainly have the dog watch.

HAPPY DAZE AGAIN

By Joe Kennedy

Dear Sarge: Drop the ever-lovin' Xeno jug for a minute while you're awarded a medal for printing three hot-and-mizzling yarns between the covers of the August issue. Below, you'll find 'em in ye olde order of preference:

1. "The Lotus Eaters." Colossal! Let's have more of Bolling Branham.

[Turn page]

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2. "Exile to Centauri." Well constructed and neatly unfolded. Yay, Rocklynne!

3. "Expedition," S-F with a different twist. Novel way of telling it, too. Here's a chance for you to pick up a few lessons in subtle humor, Sarge.

Happy days are here again! *Finlay Pie* in this issue! Speaking of art, the cover was on the right track with a rocket ship picture. But—poor artwork. Note the amazing similarity between the twin suns and a couple of fried eggs.

By the way, Sarge, how could a rocket ship catch fire in space when there's no air to support burning?

Before signing off, I wanna comment on "Tubby—Atom Smasher." Sarge, did you put that in just to give us Kiwis something to yelp about? The plot was swiped from the second grade reader. And imagine! *THE ANCIENT DREAM GAG!* Cummings can write so well when he wants to and after reading this sort of tripe, I just don't get it.

In closing, I ain't no relation to Captain Kennedy in "Visiting Yokel" and am dawggone glad I ain't—
44 Baker Ave., Dover, N. J.

The first half of your communication, Kiwi Kennedy, meets with my approval. The second section is not so hot. In the first place, my dear pee-lot, I disagree with your culinary comparison. Those flaming planets do not resemble fried ova of the barnyard persuasion because they lack sufficient albumen, and the chalazae are missing. The flames gushing from the ship come from internal fire, just as the flash of a rocket jet is visible in a vacuum.

As for such phenomena flaming and trailing out into space, how do you account for the corona of the Sun and the streamers of incandescent hydrogen which shoot out from Sol's surface for a couple of hundred thousand miles? The Tubby yarns are always dream gags based on and tintured by the particular lecture our fat little hero is attending at the time. Now go to the ship's galley, pee-lot, and fry yourself a brace of henfruit and compare them to the August cover.

COVER SHOCK

By Bill Hesson

Dear Sarge: The other day, I happened to pass a magazine store and I decided to go in and see if the August issue was out yet. I let my glance rove over the mags. Suddenly my gaze was held, riveted on one mag. Yes, it was T.W.S. The reason for my shock was that the cover was passable for a change. I picked it up and turned to the contents page, wondering who the artist could be. To my surprise it was Bergy. I honestly didn't think the guy had it in him. Finlay's drawings for "Exile to Centauri" was Bergey. I honestly didn't think the guy had it really think you ought to let him do a cover.

Now for the stories. "Exile to Centauri" was pretty good, Rocklynne can write good stuff when he wants to. "The Lotus Eaters" looked like an attempt to mix Fantasy and S-F. It was a flop. Cummings was first in the short stories and "The Amnestiac" came second. "Visiting Yokel" turned up in third place. Boucher's story was screwy. "Sun Engine" didn't even make good reading. Your department was good as usual, but I don't like poetry, and I can't see what harm a little fantasy here and there does. But I guess I shouldn't shout off my mouth so much. All in all, it was a fair issue.

Incidentally, Sarge, here's a tip for you. You had better buy up on Xeno because you can't tell when it might be rationed.—871 N. Claremont St., Pasadena 6, Calif.

Thanks for the tip, Kiwi Hesson; the old Sarge owns a controlling interest in the Xeno plant on Pluto. We tried to use it for the war effort in place of high octane gas, but it ate the lining off the cylinder walls of airplane motors and drove jeeps crazy. So Xeno was turned back to the old space dog.

A brief aria now from a space-dizzy warbler.

WHY DONTCHA ANSWER QUESTIONS?

By G. Waible

Dear Sarge: Put down that Xeno, space-beast. It's beginning to run out of your ears! And besides, it's burning holes in the floor!

Whuzzat thing on the cover? A picture of Berlin on a clear night? The Xeno-Guzzlers' Annual Outing? Sarge Saturn blowing off steam? Moonlight Over Sixth Avenue?

Now for some (in)pertinent remarks on the August issue of TWS.

Could it be that TWS is—improving? Boucher, Cartmill, and Rocklynne!! Virgil Finlay among the artists—Sarge Saturn with a new joke-book, too. Thrilling, ain't it?

If you're interested in ratings, *Happedition* is first, *Exile to Centauri* and *The Lotus Eaters* in second place, *The Amnestiac* and *Visiting Yokel* third. Friend's story was amusing in spots, but *Tubby—Atom Smasher* was the same as all of the other Tubby stories. That part about the compressed nothing was original, though—or was it?

How about bringing Edwards back for another tale in the near future? It seems that you never hear from the contest winners once they've shot their wad. How come?

Why don't you ever answer any questions, Sarge? That's what you're there for, no? I suppose it's just that it's easier to say: "Pull in your horns, pee-lot, before I play a xylophone solo on your rocket-sleeves with a spanner. Is that a permanent wave in your head, or is it just that your brain is space-warped?"

I'll beam this query to nobody in particular, since it's purely hypothetical—(or do I mean rhetorical?). It is: Why must the hero be knocked unconscious five or six times before the story is complete? Most authors say: "Stars exploded inside his brain as his loving wife brought the vase down on his head. He staggered, tried vainly to stay erect, but the floor came up and hit him in the face."

"He awoke on the floor of the hut. At last his head stopped spinning; his blurred vision focused upon the hairy ass in front of him."

Boring, ain't it? And I am not talking about those termites crawling up the table leg. Wooden chew know it?

Unlike most fans, I do like Orban's stuff. I guess this is because I am perverted. Wait'll I open my perverse and take some pennies out. Which corny pun reminds of a fellow named Knitnighly Q. Thread. He was quite a wool-gatherer, but the darned sew-and-sew needled us once too often, so we said: "Knits to you!" And that really had him in stitches. Some pun, eh, kid?

All right, Captain Future, put down that proton-pistol; I'll go quietly.—1119 N. Roselawn, Portland, Ore.

It appears to the old Sarge, Kiwi Waible, that you've ripped a few of your own stitches, and the stuffing seems to be coming out. Are you sure you feel all right? As for answering questions—Pee-lot, you ask questions that nobody can answer. The old space dog has wondered about the Amateur Contest winners many times himself. However, you can crochet me a barb-wire dolly some time—if you promise not to drop any stitches. They get brittle from the cold out in space and they shatter when they hit the steel decks.

PANS FROM THE GALLEY

By Ray Karden

Dear Sahjint: This is the first time I am writing to you, you malevolent mass of masochistic molecules, and I hope you don't mind if it's typed on yellow paper.

Now for the August issue. I will take the things in the same order as in the Contents, starting with the cover. At first glance, it looks good. But when you examine it further, it seems mechanical and distorted. I'll give it a C. (On my scale of rating, figured out on the Karden Computator, A is excellent, B is good, C is fair, D is poor, F stinks, and H is hack.)

Exile to Centauri. Just what are you trying to do

to us, Sarge? Two novels in the last three issues on almost exactly the same idea. This was the same as Bond's, and just as rotten. The stereotyped characterization, wooden dialogue, distorted motivation. . . . Need I say more? D.

But if publishing stories like Rocklynne's is a necessary adjunct to tales like *The Lotus Eaters*, even I will ask for more. Branham has written something here that is more than usual stiff, something that gives—though faintly—an aura of indefinable romance. Slightly wooden characters, strained motivations, incidents coming too fast after one another—yet it still is very excellent. I can only feel that this is an experiment on Mr. Branham's part, and am eagerly awaiting some more of his work. A well deserved A.

What, Sarge, here is *Expedition*—and another brilliant tale. You must have thrown away that jug of Xeno one day and bought some good stories in that period of unfortunately short sensibility. This is by far the best story I have ever read about Martians. Mr. Boucher is a sound writer, and he treated the idea very brilliantly. The only sore spot was in the last couple of paragraphs, but it would be rather hard to get a good ending. A.

Annesiae has me puzzled. Especially the last sentence. Nuts, what has the poor guy got to do with his wife and kids? First, there are two of him, and then he hollers: "Great God, my wife and both the kids." You do have to admit it doesn't jibe with the rest very well. C.

Cummings has been loosed upon TWS. The fans are now all gnashing their teeth with rage and horror. I have an idea, though, why he sets so much stuff to you. He encloses every manuscript with a barrel of Xeno. But somehow he doctors it to make you halfblind and you can't read the ms, so you say the heck with it, he's a nice guy anyway, and send it down to the printer. Together with any other pieces of paper that have words on them. D.

Sun Engine was about as obvious as some of those bathing suits that gals from Centauri III wear and that you goggle at as they disport in your barrel of Xeno. What an idea. What a story. It isn't well written enough for back, so I gave it F.

Visiting Yokel is a dumb little story stretched out to cover a lot of words. D

Have you got any Pete Manx stories on hand to pep up TWS a little? I hear that Hank Kuttner is in the army, and you can guess at the meaning of that. By the way, his regular stories are one of my pet hates, but Pete is bearable. As is Rocklynne's stuff, Bond's, and half a dozen others. Binder isn't bad in infrequent doses, but try to develop some new authors like Bransham, etc.—408 12th St., Cloquet, Minn.

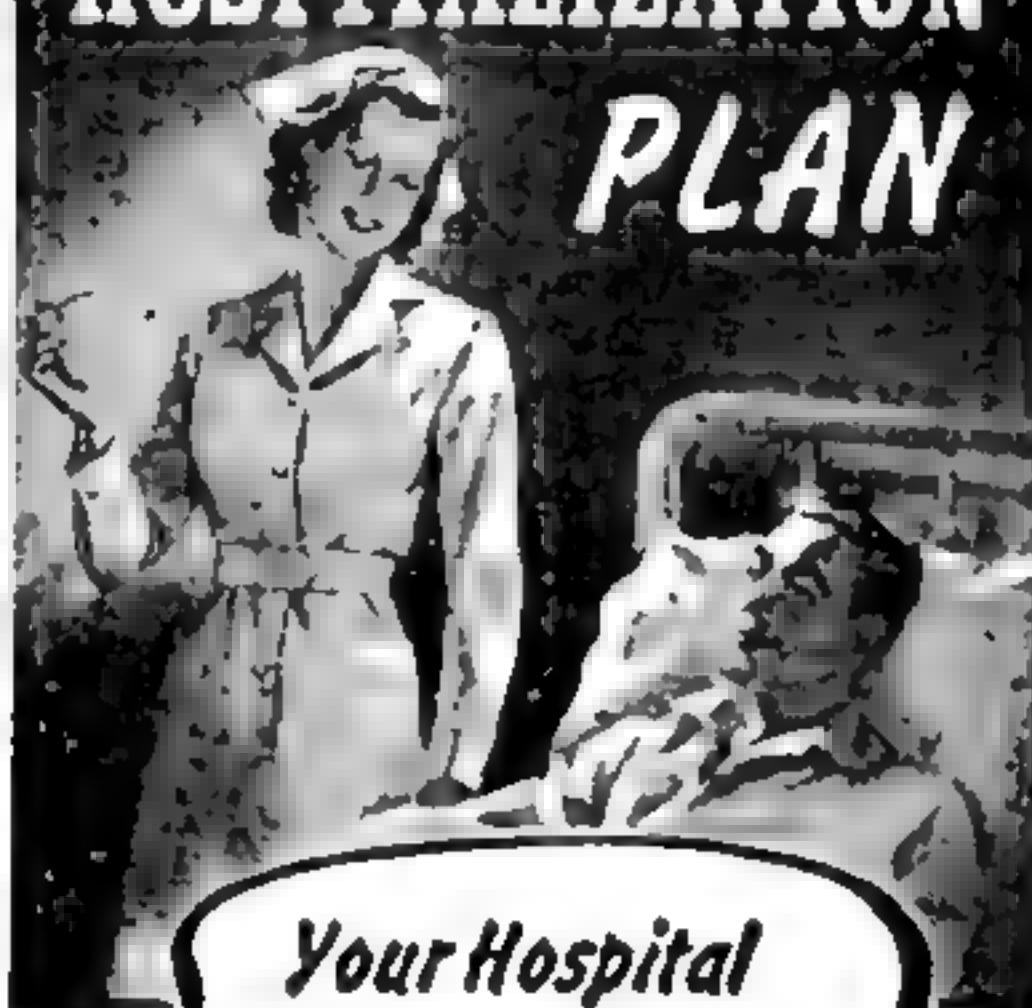
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A nice communiqué, in a gruesome sort of way, Kiwi Karden. You left out the grades of E and G in your private system, but perhaps they are dead letters—like the U in humo(u)r. I also note that subtlety is lost on you. So I won't try to explain the last lines of AMNESIAC. Let's just pretend they weren't there, and then you won't have to worry about Pete's family. Let him do his own census problems. Next complaint, please.

STANDARD LITERATURE

By Janvier L. Hamell

Dear Sarge: I have been reading your three science fiction magazines as well as some others, for the last three or four years. During this time I have more than once read a story that inspired me to write to the publishers and tell them how swell it was. However, despite these none too frequent inspirations, this is the first time I have ever written to you or any other of magazine.

The story that compelled me to write this was Bolling Branhams' "The Lotos Eaters." It is stories such as this that make sf rank actually, even if not officially, with the so-called "standard" literature. It is very hard to get me to write a letter of any kind, so you can see how this story affected me.

I am enclosing your coupon for SF League membership, but am enclosing the name-strip from inside the cover as I dislike to deface the magazine. A magazine without an outside namestrip would also be hard to classify in my collection of mags. I hope this is okeh.—1803 Marilyn Road, Philadelphia, Pa.

Kiwi Hamell, it warms the port rockets of the old Sarge's heart to know you liked THE LOTOS EATERS. You will have noticed by now that many fans agree with you and a few have no regard for your critical judgment. Nevertheless, consider yourself a junior astrogator of full standing. If you ever find that everybody agrees with what you say and think, better see a doctor.

WHAT, NO RATION TICKET?

By Wilkie Conner

Dear Sarge: My newsdealer required the surrender of no ration points when he sold me an appetizing dish of entertainment called THRILLING WONDER STORIES, August, 1943. This old non-com, is one of the best issues of TWS I've yet read, and I've read a lot of them. First off, the tales: No. 1, "The Lotus Eaters" . . . No. 2, "Exile to Centauri" . . . No. 3, "The Amnesiac" . . . No. 4, "Visiting Yokel" . . . No. 5, "The Sun Engine" and No. 6, "The Girl in the Golden Atom," or "Tubby—Atom Smasher," or "Twice Told Tales."

Second, the art. Cover, GOOD. Finlay's pix, SWELL. The BEMS on page 49, FAIR. Marchionni on page 59, GOOD. The others, above the average.

(Incidentally, in the story ratings above, I overlooked "Expedition." Let's give it 6th place and toss Cummings' thing out the porthole with the other garbage.)

Now, the article: Interesting. We should win the war, don't you think?

In the letters department, several kicks were noted concerning the June issue's swell yarn, "The Devil's Fiddle." These kicks were founded on the fact that there was no science in the story. According to the title of your book, you're supposed to print fiction that makes us WONDER. Therefore, any story that is about out-of-the-ordinary conditions or things or circumstances should have a place in the book, whether it is a science-fiction story or not. After all, why do we read the book in the first place? Entertainment! But, then, western stories are entertaining, detective stories are entertaining . . . yes, even love stories are entertaining. Thrilling Wonder Stories' stories are entertainment of an unusual nature. All of which is my way of saying I'm for printing fantasy in TWS when said fantasy is as thrilling and well-told and entertaining as was "Devil's Fiddle!" Never mind the science! We want entertainment!

Watch this George Edwards. He is going places as a writer.

Sarge, will you step out of policy just one time

and answer a simple question with an honest answer? Why do you editors print Ray Cummings' stories when you know that all the readers, or a large majority of them, will kick about 'em? Ray wrote good stuff years ago, but now he rehashes the same old stuff over again and again. I think he could write some new plots if he had to. You editors should get together and decide to keep rejecting the old master's stuff until he decides to write something that is GOOD again. Ray's a swell author. He's just been in a rut for years. And a couple of editors could get him out, if they weren't so soft-hearted. — 147 E. 18th St., Salisbury, N. C.

Pee-lot Conner, did you read Ray Cummings' WINGS OF ICARUS in a recent issue of STARTLING STORIES? He still comes up with a surprisingly good yarn quite often. And everybody doesn't kick, as you seem to think. But the old Sarge is not going to banish you to the nut and bolt compartment, because you get the idea about such yarns as THE DEVIL'S FIDDLE perfectly. Write in and tell me what you think of Fredric Brown's DAYMARE in this present issue, won't you?

THE UPWARD TREND

By Chad Oliver

Dear Sarge: With the August issue, TWS continues its upward trend, and, from all indications, 1943 is going to go down as one of the best years yet seen by the mag. Prepare thyself, honorable sir, for I am about to dissect the August TWS.

Firstly—the cover. I stand aghast. It was excellent. It was more than excellent. It's just what we poor, suffering fans have been pleading for since Lord knows when. Give TWS a pat on the back (cover). Give the editor an extra Xeno ration. And Bergey—man, give him the whole darned brewery!

And now we stagger on to the fictional realm, in which the stories rank as follows:

1. "The Lotus Eaters," by Bolling Branham. Every bit as good as the cover illustrating it. In these days, when authors madly pound out a million words a week in order to keep their output up alongside the famous J. Worthington Corny-Fellow or some such, it is indeed a very rare and refreshing thing to come across a story so well-written that, in parts, it reads almost like prose-poetry. It made me somehow think of Merritt, although Branham's style is entirely different. The similarity, I believe, lies in the fact that both authors impress one as being both careful workmen and inspired workmen. On bended knees, our hero (me) crawls into Ye Editor's office and feebly waves a weak, thin hand. His mouth falls open, and from said gaping orifice one word can be faintly heard: "More . . ."

2. "Expedition," by Anthony Boucher. It is indeed an indication of better days when an author like Boucher appears in the hallowed pages of TWS. I laughed my head off at parts of this yarn, and then came the ending. No being on the third planet ever knows. . . . Hmmmm!

3. "Tubby—Atom Smasher," by Ray Cummings. One of the best authors in the business today—or yesterday, or tomorrow—comes through with an extremely well-written piece that, while perhaps intended as a partial satire of Ray's famous "Girl in the Golden Atom," nonetheless inspires many nostalgic memories. More from Cummings, please—and plenty of it.

4. "The Amnesiac," by George Edwards. The fact that Mr. Edwards is an amateur and yet places fourth speaks for itself.

5. "Sun Engine," by Owen Fox Jerome. Good!

6. "Visiting Yokel," by Cleve Cartmill. There is an old saying that goes, "When he was good he was very, very good, but when he was bad he was terrible." That doesn't apply to Cartmill, however. His saying goes, "when he was good he was very, very good, and all other times he was mediocre." This time he was mediocre. Next time—

7. "Exile to Centauri," by Ross Rocklynne. Oh, brother! I never, in all my wildest dreams, thought that ace-fict oneer Rocklynne would stoop to corny hack. But he shore did this time! The writing was passable, but incredibly listless. I wouldn't have been a bit surprised had I read something like:

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[Turn page]

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guards. Then he stole a rocket ship and went back to his pop-corn machine. Twenty minutes later he had saved Earth and was back with his princess again. Amen."

The net result is that the reader doesn't give a worn-out safety-pin whether Barney saves Earth or gets tossed in a tub of acid. As for the plot, and especially the "te.materio"—Aaaahle-e-e-e!!!

With nary a pause, Oliver tears into the artwork. Finlay, being Finlay, takes first place. The pic on page 19 was really superb. It was a pity that it had to be wasted on a corn opera like "Exile to Centauri." Orban had the only other passable pic. Marchioni's work was an absolute disgrace to Mr. Branham's superb story.

The article was good, and the departments—most of them at least—were likewise. "The Reader Speaks," sad to relate, was rather mediocre this trip. Anyone who did not appreciate de Mexico's classic, "The Devil's Fiddle," or pans it because it wasn't science-fiction, merely is advertising his own lack of intelligence. Yes, Mr. Joe Kennedy, I had you in mind particularly. Another poem like that and there is gonna be war!

Enuf for now, eh, Sarge?—3956 Ledgewood, Cincinnati, O.

All right for you, Kiwi Oliver. You may take the next watch at the astrogation panel. Queer, isn't it, how your comments reverse certain others? That's what keeps the old space dog awake on these voyages. Never a dull moment in the conflict of opinions. And don't say this department is mediocre! Your senior astrogator won't have you space monkeys talking about yourselves that way.

Here comes another pee-lot who reverses your rating of THE LOTOS EATERS.

SCIENCE VERSUS ENTERTAINMENT

By Guy Trucano, Jr.

Dear Sarge: I just finished the August issue of TWS, and I'm beginning to wonder if it's any use! In fact, I remained awake until 3:00 A.M. to see if by any chance there was a slight improvement in the layout of the magazine. As far as magazines in general go, TWS still occupies a high place. But for heaven's sakes let's have a few changes in all of them! Here is how I rate the stories:

1. "The Amnesiac"
2. "Expedition"
3. "Exile to Centauri"
4. "Visiting Yokel"
5. "Sun Engine"
6. "Tubby—Atom Smasher"
7. "The Lotus Eaters"

Here is why I rate the stories thus and so, and also what all the yelling was about in the first part of the letter. The Number One story was interesting if not scientific or thrilling. (Complaint: sci-fi?)

The Number Two story was thrilling but the only science was the minor matter of a space flight. (Complaint: sci-fi?)

The Number Three story might have been the best but it reminded me far too much of two other stories I have read of men who traveled, one in space to Sirius, the other in time to France, and saved the girl and the country.

The fourth was all right but not exactly scientific. It was thrilling, though.

The fifth was scientific enough, but not particularly thrilling. It seemed too much like those comic-book stories of two pages.

As to the sixth and seventh stories—well, the sixth could happen to anybody, but why Cummings? Up until now I have been one of those too few Cummings fans, but another one like that and I won't even read him again. It should have been a good story, but it didn't hit the usual level.

I most heartily agree with Burgeson. Leave Lotus and Lotos out of the book. It's really pretty fierce.

Beginning at the beginning, I went through the entire book and went through the entire mag, and at that it was fairly good. How can Burgeson be such a combination of genius and madman, first insulting "Lotus Juice" and then insulting my dear friend, Hope?

About Kennedy. Maybe "The Devil's Fiddle" wasn't so scientific, but it sure was thrilling, and anyway it made me so interested that I looked up certain facts, by which deed I got a good grade in history for the day.

The features were all as good as usual, and (also as usual) I considered The Reader Speaks the best. It always gives me something to gripe about, which happens to be my main joy in life. Wonders of War and Scientifacts follow in that order.

Incidentally, old dear, is STARTLING STORIES being published any more? The last time I saw one was in March. I'd like to get one again some day.
—Bob III, Dickinson, N. D.

It strikes me, Kiwi Trucano—or shall the senior astrogator just call you Junior?—that you are arguing on both sides of the haystack. You seem to want both kinds of cake. Anyway, that's what you are getting, and if our chief astrogator rings into another type of inflammable cargo on us—we'll carry it, too, and hold the usual post mortem here in the dissecting room.

Meanwhile, keep up your griping. It gives the old Sarge an excuse to take aspirin and Xeno. Oh, yes, STARTLING STORIES is still going strong. You've missed at least two issues—with another coming up shortly. Better catch up on your outside reading, chum, or you won't be able to do your astrogation work properly.

And it would never do to close the ports this voyage and take off without a boost on the rear rockets from the indefatigable Sergeant Mace. Here he is with that pointed comment on CHILDREN OF THE GODS that I promised at the head of this department.

FUTILITY

By Jerry A. Mace

To: Sgt. Saturn. From: Sgt. Mace. Subject: TWS
for August 1943.

1. It has been noted that the August cover contained an alleged portrayal of a space ship conceived and executed by one Citizen Bergey. It is charged

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that this so-called space ship is a deliberate attempt to sabotage the imaginations of green recruits and the color sense of old peo-lets. The dishwater cure is recommended for Citizen Bergey, and a slug of Xeno all around.

2. It has also been noted that of seven stories published in this issue only two were of sufficient quality to merit our approval—"The Lotos Eaters" and "Expedition." The lead novel, "Exile to Centauri," was deemed so horrible it was voted a special "tsk-tsk."

3. The article "Sky-Going Aircraft Carrier" has been forwarded to the Armchair Strategist and Monday Morning Quarterback Club which meets regularly every Sunday morning under a table at the Spacemen's Bar.

4. The readers' section seemed to be composed mainly of egocentric kiwis and frustrated limerick writers. Kiwis Burgeson and Hunter are the sort that make the soothing sanity of Pee-lot Ebey and others appreciated and missed. Where is Ebey? As for Katie Mack and her "Ties of Steel," we feel that the description of her hero was inadequate and lacking in some respects, and so we were compelled to add these few lines of pertinent data on CHILDREN OF THE GODS, titled "Futility."

The hero's heart was made of iron,
His stomach cast of lead;
His kidneys were of chromalloy—
But rust was in his head.

He really had no use for love;
Steel filings were his diet.
But since his head was full of rust
He thought that he would try it.

5. Any questions?—Fort Knox, Ky.

Speaking for the rocket gang, Pee-lot Mace, the old Sarge would say this robot jingle-jingle stuff has gone far enough. Any more of such sterling and golden poetry, and we'll likely have Grag coming up with some lines of copper from his internal hopper. So, suppose we stop 'er right here.

Speaking of stoppers, that reminds me—Wart Ears, uncork me a fresh jug of Xeno and shake a little powdered aspirin over my bald spot. You junior astrogators take over and see if you can berth this November issue without crashing through the foundations of the space port. The old Sarge is going to dream a while of sweet Hallee, the gal whose family name is Tosis.

Peace be with you space imps—and keep your noses out of the fuel chambers.

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A Lesson in Arithmetic

IN THE LAST WORLD WAR, four thousand men were killed in the ten minutes before the Armistice was declared. Multiply that ten minutes by hours and days and weeks, and months, and even years and you will realize to what extent the power to shorten this war, and save the lives of thousands of our boys, lies within your pocket and your power. Buy Bonds!

—FANNIE HURST



LOST

*Where'll I eat?
Where'll I sleep?
Where's my girl?*

Last week on KP I kept thinking, "When I get to New York on my furlough, that'll be the day!"

So here I am, only I don't know my way around any more'n the Man From Mars. Can't even find my girl in this whale of a station.

Tell me: what's a guy to do?

Listen, soldier, sailor, marin' We'll find a room for you, a good place to eat.

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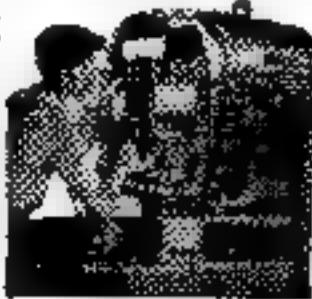
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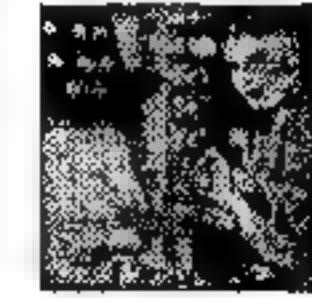
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THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

IF YOU have already read the main story in this issue, you know what a science detective yarn of the future on a distant planet is like—as conceived by a popular author of first-rate detective tales. If you haven't yet read DAYMARE, by Fredric Brown, you have a thrilling treat in store.



Meanwhile, read what Author Brown tells us about the creation of this story:

The plot of DAYMARE was evolved, rather than conceived

It started with my wondering—after reading a scientific article on the limitations of hypnotism—just what would happen if those limitations were removed, what would happen if hypnotism is ever put on a mechanized basis.

Steps have been taken in that direction already, of course. Psychologists can induce hypnotic sleep by having their patients stare fixedly at a revolving mirror or a moving, mechanically controlled point of light.

Those are not particularly efficient contrivances, but they do work. Probably the reason for their limited efficiency is the fact that they are empiric discoveries. The principles behind them, why they work, are not fully understood. The mystery lies, of course, not in the mechanism of the revolving mirror, but in the mysterious mechanism of the human mind which makes it react so strangely to such stimuli. When the psychological problems of hypnotism are more fully understood, will it not then be practicable to construct a greatly more efficient method of mechanically creating the hypnotic state?

There's nothing in the least unlikely about this. With our knowledge advancing in all other fields, it would be strange if our knowledge of hypnotism and our ability to hypnotize, would stand still.

But the social implications of mechanized mass hypnosis—ah, there's where the story began to evolve. Involuntary hypnosis could be used beneficially—but it could be used just as easily for evil.

Today, a fanatic has a hypnotic hold over the people of a European country. But it took him years to build up that control. Suppose such a man could obtain absolute control over the minds of a people instantaneously?

Yes, a truly efficient method of mechanical hypnosis—made available to the crackpots, the fanatics, the criminals of the world—would lead to unthink-

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL
A GOD NAMED KROO
By HENRY KUTTNER

able chaos. Such knowledge would, of necessity, be made taboo. In time, it might be forgotten.

Then, if rediscovered by a ruthless individual, it would lead to another cataclysm.

And if that discoverer, God forbid, had a warped sense of humor, the result would be—DAYMARE!—*Fredric Brown*.

PERIL ON PHOEBUS

On the other hand, the featured novelet in this issue—**PERIL ON PHOEBUS**, by Nelson S. Bond—started out to be a detective story of today right here on Earth and developed into a perfect scientific fiction yarn without any detective business about it.

Mr. Bond writes:

As a general thing, I have little of interest to relate in this column about the piece appearing elsewhere in the book.

But it's a long worm that has no turning! For once in my life, I have a little secret to tell about *Peril on Phoebus*. It is a story that started out as a modern detective tale—and ended up several centuries in the future on a far world!

The germ of the story lies, of course, in the novel idea that two simple, easily procured substances and a very commonplace solvent can be combined to form a violent and instantaneous explosive. Discovering this little-known fact, my authorial sense immediately spotted the story possibility inherent thereto. I envisioned the tale as an arson crime committed to cover a murder. Business, you know, of a killer leaving town, mailing packages of the substances to himself, and thereby setting fire to an unoccupied house—get it?

Yeah—so did I! Up to that point. Then not a step further. Because I couldn't for the life of me see how any dick, howsoever courageous or acute, could possibly solve the perfect crime I had invented!

So the plot went into the junk-pile. That was two years ago. Then, recently, I found it still lurking around the fringes of what I laughingly like to call "my brain"—and I began to see how the theme could be woven into a stf. story. I sat me down and did a little good old-fashioned brow-knitting, came up with all the necessary answers—and here it is, folks! For better or worse—*Peril on Phoebus*!

If you like it, tell the editor of **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**. If you don't, drop me a personal line in a heavily-sealed envelope edged in black. I don't want a good customer ever to find out you don't like my stories!—*Nelson S. Bond*.

MAN FROM THE STARS

In science fiction we are always getting stories about alien invasion of Earth—or vice versa. That was why **MAN FROM THE STARS** struck us as having a different sort of appeal. Author Williams tells us:

It is hard to write with any real meaning the true story behind the story, for the quite obvious reason that to do so would involve setting up a complete picture of the author and his beliefs, the life he has lived, where he has lived it, the books he has read, the plays he has seen, the things he has thought about. The author builds the story out of his mind and all the things that have gone into his mind influence the story. All that can be done, in the short space available here, is completely to ignore the background factors and to give the origin of the main idea with which the story is concerned. This is a sketchy and unsatisfactory performance. It is the best that can be done.

Thinking back now, trying to select from a thousand nebulous ideas the thought that gave impetus to the writing of "The Man from the Stars," I find myself at a loss. I don't exactly know the source of the original idea. Perhaps it came from a book, perhaps from a science fiction magazine. Whatever its source, a thought came into my mind. It found there a certain pattern of ideas and mental reactions—a seed bed. Out of this pattern the story was germinated.

Perhaps the central core out of which the story was produced was the idea that now and then strange creatures appear on earth. I do not know that this ever happens. I have never seen it happen. But under no circumstances would I deny that it could happen. So, in **THE MAN FROM THE STARS**, I made it happen. I hope you like it.—*Robert Moore Williams*.



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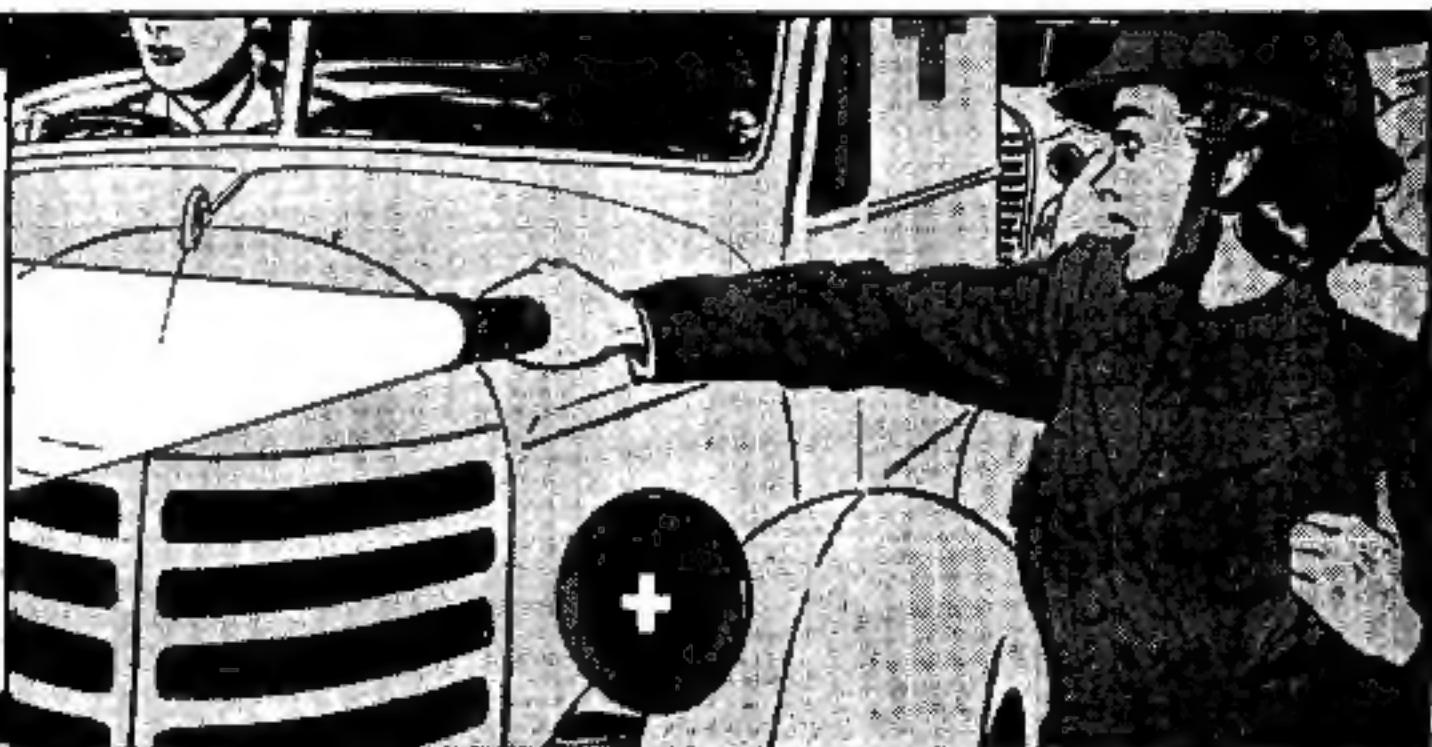


(The exciting experience of Margaret Bridges, of the London Auxiliary Ambulance service, during one of London's heaviest raids. Pretty, attractive 30-year-old Miss Bridges is part English, part American. She volunteered for the ambulance service, reporting for duty just three days before war was declared.)

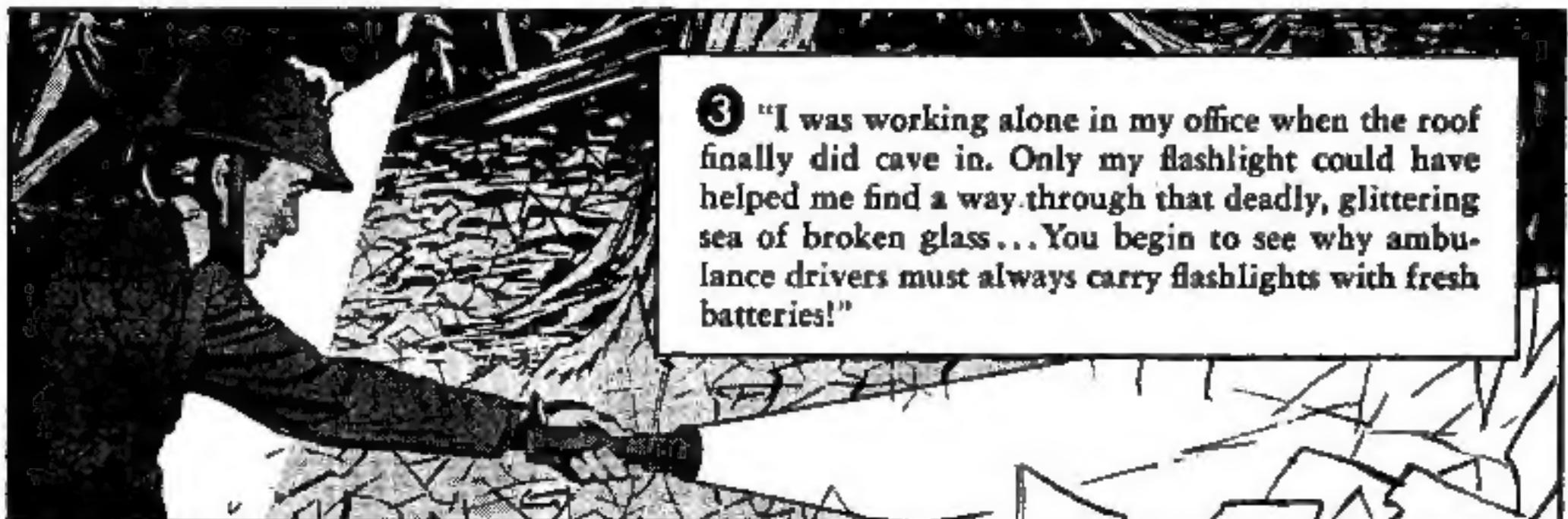


1 "We had about 40 ambulances and other cars stored in a building with a great glass roof—a virtual greenhouse—when Jerry's bombers arrived. When they began finding our section of London we started getting the cars out..."

2 "Naturally, the transparent roof taboo'd ordinary lights. Yet we hadn't a moment to lose; with every sickening crash we expected the roof to splinter into a million heavy daggers. I got out my flashlight. In about ten minutes I had guided all the cars to safety..."



3 "I was working alone in my office when the roof finally did cave in. Only my flashlight could have helped me find a way through that deadly, glittering sea of broken glass... You begin to see why ambulance drivers must always carry flashlights with fresh batteries!"



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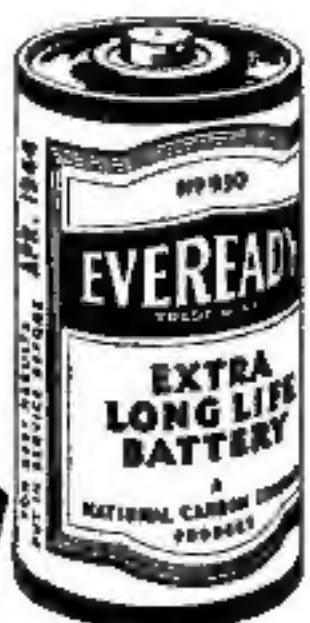
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